PHILIPPA AT SCHOOL

BY

S. K. ENSDAILE

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PHILIPPA AT SCHOOL

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BY

S. K. ENSDAILE

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PHILIPPA AT SCHOOL

CHAPTER I

THE DECREE GOES FORTH AND IS CONFIRMED

"SCANDALOUS! Absolutely scandalous!" muttered Colonel Stoddart. He was regarding a printed form on the top of which appeared in large type, "DUNSCOMBE COLLEGIATE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS," and he appeared to be in anything but a good temper. Crossing the room, he rang the bell violently.

"Send Miss Philippa to me," he thundered, and the maid withdrew. Had Philippa Stoddart's school report arrived at any other time, the chances are that the peppery Colonel would merely have lighted his pipe with it. But he had had much to try him that morning. His razor had slipped, the bath water had been tepid, there were no kidneys for

breakfast. Again he said to himself, "Scandalous!"

"Did you want me, Father?" A dark head appeared at the window, which was flung open from the bottom. One long black leg had insinuated itself into the room, and Philippa Stoddart now sat astride the window sill, preparatory to bringing her whole person into her father's sanctum.

"Philippa, will you never learn discipline? Enter by the door."

The girl disappeared with a whirl of long legs, and soon a discreet tap announced her arrival at the proper entrance. Evidently the old man was in a frazzle. There was great need for conciliation on her part. She entered demurely, and, instead of perching herself on the arm of a chair, stood at soldierly attention.

"I have received a report of your conduct and progress at Dunscombe, Philippa," began Colonel Stoddart severely. "It's . . . it's scandalous!"

Philippa opened her violet eyes widely. What was the old man at, to be reading reports? She gaped at him.

The Colonel began to read from the document in his hand:

"'*Mathematics:* Has ability but is idle.

English: Philippa might do well but she lacks concentration.

Latin: Makes no effort. Idle and careless.'

Idle and careless, indeed! What do you think I send you to Dunscombe for? Idle and careless! And what's this?

"'*French:* Has made little progress this term.'

And here, under '*General Remarks*': 'Philippa shuns work.' Shuns work! What you need is military discipline — military discipline! How old are you?"

"Fourteen, Father."

"And what form are you in?"

"IVA, Father."

"And who writes these things?" He flourished the report in a threatening manner.

"Oh, Miss Case and Miss Barnet-Coldridge, and . . . and . . . oh, all of them, you know—the mistresses. And then Miss

Courtney—she's our old girl—our Head, you know. She ticks it off at the bottom. I . . . I've had a report every term, you know, Father, haven't I ? "

" Yes, you have," said the Colonel shortly, " but not like this one."

Philippa took leave to doubt it, but said nothing.

" All I have to say is," went on the Colonel, warming to his job, " that this won't do. Won't do at all. And I won't have it—won't have it ! I will not let you go to Scilly this summer, if this sort of thing doesn't improve. Can't understand it ! Not one thing good ! Upon my soul, any young fellow can be good at something. Of course you are not a young fellow, but same thing, same thing —no discipline ! What *can* you do ? "

" Well," said Philippa modestly, " I'm not so bad with my back-hand drive. No great shakes, of course, but last term I beat——"

" I was asking you about work—about work," interrupted the Colonel, " not pat-ball."

Philippa flushed hotly. " We don't play pat-ball."

"Same thing, same thing! That's nothing to do with it. You must improve next term, do you hear? Everything must be better, and something must be really good—really good. Keep you here at Thrushcroft else, with a governess. No Scilly. A woman can't grow up ignorant. Heaven knows I don't hold with clever women, but . . . idle and careless! Scandalous!"

With the last utterance of his favourite word, and with a pleasant sense of duty done, Colonel Stoddart returned to his letters and his paper, whilst Philippa, with dismay in her heart, sped round to the back of the house to take counsel with her twin brother. Her longed-for holiday in Scilly to be dependent on anything so chancy as a school report! It was unthinkable. Disgust lent wings to her feet.

She found Tim where she had left him, tinkering up a motor-bike.

"Hello, Tim!"

"Hello, Flip!"

"Whatever do you think?"

"Tink's pups have——"

"No."

"We haven't won the——"

"No."

"Well, give us that spanner then, and tell a chap."

"The old man has been rowing me about my report at Dunscombe."

"Your what?"

"My . . . report . . . at . . . Dunscombe."

"Well, all right. Keep your hair on. He rowed me about mine once."

"Did he? Did he remember about it the term after?"

"Dunno. Here, give us that screw. And hold this a minute."

Some moments were spent in anxious adjustment of various screws, during which Philippa's hands became as grimy as her brother's. She returned to the attack.

"Did he, Timmy?"

"Did he what?"

"Remember?"

"I tell you I forget. I think he did. But what's that got to do with it, anyway?"

"Well, he says, unless my next report is

better, I shan't go to Scilly. Says he'll make me stay here with a governess."

Tim whistled.

"All my subjects must improve, and one must be really good. Which shall I make really good, Timmy?"

"English," said Tim instantly. "Any ass can get a good report in English."

"Yes," said Philippa mournfully, "but not this ass. You don't know Ethel V."

"I know her brother though, potty ass! Look out, Flip, I'm going to start her up."

Tim Stoddart, with the pride of an owner of a Rolls-Royce, bestrode the dilapidated two-stroke abandoned as derelict by an elder brother, and began to kick hopefully, but with no result.

"Let's have the plug out and see if she'll spark," suggested Philippa. The two bent to their job with an earnestness worthy of any cause. "She sparks all right. Must be engine trouble."

"Now I'll have another try at starting her up," announced Tim.

"No, you don't," said Flip. "It's my go."

She swung her leg over the saddle and held the handle-bars caressingly. Oil and petrol had been turned on. She gave an inquiring kick. No answer. Another. No answer. Five or six in quick succession. Not at home.

"Give us a shove, Tim. Let's see if she'll come up that way."

"Hold the exhaust then."

"Right."

"Ready?"

"Yes."

"In number one?"

"*Yes!* Come *on*, you ass."

"All right, I'm shoving."

"She's coming on. Listen!"

"Let go the exhaust, Flip! Open her out a bit. Steady!"

With a report like a gun, a snort, and a roar, the Rex Acme, which had not stirred for two years, went plunging down the drive, with Philippa in rejoicing command and Tim hopping excitedly in the rear. To make the old bike work had been the dream of their lives ever since their elder brother Jack, in a brief period of reckless good nature, had

initiated them into the joys of motor cycling. Their days had been spent in reading *The Motor Cycle* and in tinkering their "bus"; their nights in dreaming of the blissful moment when it should begin to hum. And now the moment had come! Tim's fingers itched to be at the throttle.

"Hi, Flip! my go now," he shouted. "Slip her into neutral. Don't stop the engine whatever you do."

"Will you let me come on the back then?" bargained cautious Flip.

"Rather!"

With the engine ticking like some infernal machine, the exchange of seat was effected, and Flip perched herself on the inadequate carrier. Tim slipped into first gear, let go the clutch, and, with a spring and a stagger which came near to unseating the passenger, the old Rex resumed its panting progress.

"Try her in second, Tim," yelled Flip when a few yards had been traversed.

This too high ambition proved their downfall. Tim lifted the clutch, slipped into second, let out the clutch, and hoped for the best. But alack for the strain upon Rex's

degenerate innards! The machine gave a spasmodic leap, tore off sideways, and landed itself and the twins into the midst of a very handsome rhododendron bush. The engine throbbed a moment and gave up the ghost. The twins disentangled themselves. Their first thought was for the bike, their second for the bush.

"Lord! we've done it now," said Tim. "He's crazy about that white rhododendron —and look at it!"

They both looked. The erstwhile beautiful blossoms were crushed and spoilt; the bush itself had suffered damage. The magnitude of the disaster for a moment deprived the twins of speech. Flip was the first to recover.

"We must remove the evidence," she said practically. "Let's pray Heaven he won't pass this way for a bit. Haul out poor old Rex. She didn't mean it."

With infinite exertion they dragged the poor bus to what Flip called a standing position, and hastily shoved her back to her old resting-place in the garage. Their next move was to arm themselves with rakes and remove the tell-tale wheelmarks.

"This is like Sherlock Holmes reversed," said Flip. "What really bothers me is what I'm to say about my clothes."

Tim cast a casual eye upon his sister's raiment and his face fell. "Good Lord!" he ejaculated, and well he might. All the oil in the tank seemed to have found a lasting home on Flip's striped flannel frock, and a jagged rent in the right sleeve exposed an arm.

"Better cut it and make for the beach, hadn't we?" Tim said. "That'll give us time to think, anyway, and I don't see we can do anything more here. Better create—— what is it Sherlock calls it?"

"A lullaby." Flip spoke confidently.

"Ass! That's what you sing to a baby. *Alibi* is what I mean. When the criminal is somewhere else."

"Right-o," said Flip. "Buck up, then. I'd rather create a new frock myself. Still, we may as well create something, so let's make it *alibi*."

Cautiously they crept through the plantation on the left, and soon were in full flight for Innsborough Cove, their refuge and favourite abiding-place.

"I've an idea," said Flip, as they sat on a rock. "I must be drowned, and my body must be taken dripping to my sorrowful father."

"Idiot! I tell you what, though. I don't see why your frock shouldn't be drowned. I know!" Tim went on excitedly: "we'll pretend we bathed and your frock got carried out by the tide——"

"After that I walk dripping up to Thrushcroft and Aunt Clarissa!" Flip closed her eyes in speechless joy.

"No, you donkey; not that, of course. I go up to the house and explain that you've no clothes, and that I must take some new ones to you."

"Am I to shiver here the while with no frock on? No, thank you! Think of something better, Timmy, my boy."

"You needn't take your clothes off till I come back," said Tim. "Then you can change, and we can throw your things into the sea."

"And suppose Mary, or Aunt Clarissa, comes down with you to scold my shivering person? No, Tim. Drown the clothes first

and clothe me in your blazer and sweater while you run for aid. I'll leave you the trousers," Flip added magnanimously.

With shouts of laughter she began to undress in the warm May sunshine, and soon, clad in sweater and blazer, she was engaged in helping Tim to dispose of the "corpse." Heavily weighted with stones, the frock was heaved from a cliff, and, as Flip put it, sank without a groan to a watery grave.

"Now, hurry up, my gallant rescuer," she said. "It isn't too warm in these glad rags."

Tim sped away whilst Philippa sat down and pulled her scanty clothing about her. Clasping her knees with her arms and humming a little song, she rocked to and fro upon the cliff-top.

She had not meditated long when a voice made her start.

"This is Tim, my youngest boy," Colonel Stoddart was saying. At her side stood the tall form of her father, and with him a soldierly-looking young man.

"It's . . . it's me, Father, not Tim,"

stammered Philippa, regardless of grammar. "You see my clothes went and got themselves carried out to sea, and I had not much else to wear. Tim has gone up to Thrushcroft to get me something, and in the meanwhile left me what he could spare." She clasped her knees more firmly and looked threateningly at the young man, who was obviously amused.

"May I lend you anything?" he inquired. "My pullover is at your service if you are cold."

"Thank you," said Philippa, with dignity, "I am entirely warm, and my brother will shortly be here. Indeed, I see him coming."

The young man, feeling that he would be *de trop* in the family conclave, began to descend the winding path to the beach. In the meantime Tim arrived to face the music, and loud and prolonged the music proved. Beginning from their babyhood, the tale of their misdeeds was hurled at their heads. Fierce squadrons of "scandalous" rent the air. The twins were assured in one breath that their lack of military discipline would lead them to hanging, and in the next that

their unfortunate parent would be there to say "I told you so."

In the midst of the storm there reappeared the young man, bearing the remains of a striped frock.

"I've rescued this," he said amiably, anxious to create a diversion. With speechless disgust Tim and Flip regarded the relic.

Colonel Stoddart took it and held it up. "As I thought," he said. "You wished to be rid of this, Philippa, for obvious reasons. We had better be going on," he continued, turning to his friend who, in much discomfort, was regretting his too hasty action. "I will see the twins to-night."

"Must have drifted back on the tide," said Tim, regarding the frock with disfavour. "Now what on earth made that johnny bring it up? We shall have the deuce of a row to-night. That bush!"

"And I was hoping not to call his attention to me for the rest of the holidays," said Philippa mournfully. "Not much chance of his forgetting about the report if he has me up evening and morning of the same day."

And from the remarks of the Colonel when

he discovered the damaged bush, and unerringly traced the mischief to the twins, there seemed little likelihood that he would forget. The need for the reformation of Philippa at home and at school was strongly borne in upon him.

"I shall see your next report," he pronounced. "No improvement, no Scilly."

CHAPTER II

TERM BEGINS

THE Easter holiday sped swiftly by, and Tim and Philippa Stoddart were soon on their way back to their respective schools, which were situated within three miles of each other. Philippa was in a sufficiently gay mood. The holidays were all right, of course, and it was good to be with Tim; but the Colonel and Aunt Clarissa had seemed to concentrate far too much on imperfections. It was therefore with a joyful heart that, in defiance of rules, she leaned far out of the carriage window to wave a salute to Beth Freeman, her friend and crony.

By a little manœuvring the two managed to be among those who were to walk from the station to the school, and, as they went through fields and winding lanes up the long incline which led to Dunscombe Cleeve, they

talked eagerly of the holidays, and then turned to thoughts of school.

"Any new girls?" asked Philippa.

"One, so Doris Elliot told me," replied Beth, "and she sounds rum. She's the daughter of a poet, and she's called Maisie Morello Crantock. Ever hear anything like it? Maisie Morello!"

"Gosh!" said Philippa. "What did her god-father and god-mothers then for her? By the way, you see how I can spout the Catechism? That's a beginning! I'm going to turn over a shining leaf this term. My father gave me a row over my last school report, and says I'm not to go to Scilly unless I improve and make one subject really good. Tim says English is the thing to have a shy at. Any mug can do it. He doesn't know E. V., of course, but——"

"You'd better pal up with Maisie Morello," laughed Beth. "She's the daughter of a poet. You're a flat if you plank for English. Nobody on the staff so hard to get a good report out of as E. V. Now, Miss MacCarthy——"

"Now, Miss MacCarthy!" mocked Flip. "Ha, ha, Beth; still strong on the Mac?

Botany? I don't think. Any new mistresses?"

"One—and they say she's a mutt. At least, Grace Kellaway says so. Grace lives at a place near where I go for the holidays, and she goes to St. Hilary's, where this Clemence woman comes from. She says you can do anything with her—absolutely anything. Here's hoping she'll take our preps. Good old 'Dunces'! Looks jolly to-day, doesn't it?"

Dunscombe School, or "Dunces," as it was lovingly called by its inmates, was surely one of the most beautifully situated schools in England. The pile of buildings crested the hill and overlooked a wooded coombe and the sea. Once the home of a noble family, it retained much of its former stateliness, and looked loftily down upon the spacious park, with its dreaming trees flecked by May sunshine. The two girls passing through the lodge gates felt a thrill of pleasure.

"Jolly old place!" said Flip.

"Yes."

"Think we'll get No. 8, Beth?"

"Heavens! I'd forgotten. Let's run!"

They ran up the drive until they came to the bend beyond which they could be seen from the school windows. They were resuming a more sober pace when a girl of about their own age, with flying corn-coloured hair, came whirling down the drive, and precipitated herself into the arms of each of her friends in turn.

"We've got it!" she cried, "we've got it! No 8! But we've a new girl stuck on to us —Maisie Morello Crantock!"

"Maisie Morello Crantock!" said Beth.

"Maisie Morello Crantock!" echoed Flip, "but she's the daughter of a poet!"

"Five years she grew in sun and shower!" said Beth.

"A lady of my own!" capped Flip.

"You wait till you see her," grinned Jennifer Holloway. "By the way, you've both got to go and see Barney before tea. Maisie Morello is with her. So long! See you in No. 8 anon." Jennifer betook herself to her unpacking while her two friends proceeded to tidy themselves before seeking their house-mistress.

"Bet she's got golden curls and a lisp,"

said Beth as, ten minutes later, the two were making their way along the corridor to Miss Barnet-Coldridge's room. "She'll probably talk in her sleep. One of these highly strung folks and all that. You won't be able to raise any stinks with your old experiments in No. 8 now, Beth. Maisie Morello won't like it. Mighty sensitive, poets! But I say, old girl, I shall make it English all right, living with a poet, what! Here, *you* knock."

"No, you!"

"Go on, you ass!"

"Come in!" said Miss Barnet-Coldridge, and in they went.

"How do you do, Philippa? How do you do, Elizabeth? This is Maisie Crantock, who is to share No. 8 with you and Jennifer Holloway. I hope you will be happy together. Maisie has never been to school before, but she will soon fall into our ways."

Beth's mother and Flip's aunt would have blushed at the ill-breeding displayed by their charges at this point. They were staring, staring hard and unbelievingly at the girl to whom they were being introduced. This

Maisie Crantock? This the golden-haired daughter of a poet? Snub-nosed, freckled, with hair close cropped and sandy at that, Maisie shook hands awkwardly with her room-mates.

"You'd like to go and unpack, I expect," said Miss Barnet-Coldridge brightly. The three girls filed out, Flip leading the way and Beth bringing up the rear. Arrived at No. 8 there ensued a silence broken by Flip, who came forward politely.

"Would you like to wash your hands, Maisie?"

"No; I washed them this morning, thank you," replied Maisie, as though once a day were her limit with water.

"Yes, oh yes, of course," said Flip, rather daunted. "We'll get out our things and put the study straight, shall we?"

"I . . . I haven't any things!" Maisie was in an agony of embarrassment.

"Ah well, all the less to dust," said Beth, grinning. "Jen's got enough for ten, worse luck! Buck up, Flip. Stick up your household gods and let's go down to tea. I'm starving. There's the bell."

With a silent Maisie in tow, the friends made their way to the dining-room. With a silent Maisie in the midst, they ate their bread and butter and drank their tea. Only in reply to a direct question was her voice heard when Beth, for something to say, asked why she was called Morello.

Maisie blushed painfully. "After a mountain, a beautiful mountain in Italy. But," she added after a pause, "I hate it. Couldn't you call me something plain?"

"Will Thomas do you?" inquired Flip blandly; "no flourish to Thomas."

"I . . . I'd like that," stammered Maisie.

"Very well," said Flip. "Beth, seize the child, and, Jen, you bring the teapot."

Maisie's head was forced upon the table by strong hands, and Flip, the teapot aloft, stood over her.

"Not hot, is it, Flip?"

"Hot! at 'Dunces'!" Flip spoke with infinite disdain. "When have we been so coddled, I ask you. Ready? Keep the newborn from squealing. Jen and Beth, you are sponsors. Now! Name this child."

"Thomas," said the two girls together.

The tea poured over Maisie's forehead, and Flip with priestly unction chanted: "Thomas, I baptize thee in the name of 'Dunces' and all that appertaineth thereto. Be faithful, sporting, and valiant. Amen."

All had hoped that this ceremony would break the ice, but once the girls had returned to No. 8 the frost seemed to have set in as strong as everly.

"I say, Thomas, what's your best game?" asked Flip.

But Thomas only stared uncomprehendingly.

"You know—hockey, cricket, tennis! Which do you play best?"

"I haven't ever played them," said Thomas.

"Which is your best subject?" queried Beth desperately.

"I . . . I haven't one," said Thomas. "I'm not much good at anything."

Beth cast a despairing glance at Jennifer, who grimaced back. Flip came to the rescue. "That's bad luck on me, young Tom," she said. "I meant to get a good

report for English through mugging things off you."

Thomas smiled. She liked being called "young Tom," and she liked this dark-haired girl who didn't seem to care for anything. Flip on her part, observing the smile, wondered whether, after all, the new girl was as plain and disappointing as they had thought.

"Believe I'm going to like her," she said to herself. Nevertheless she was relieved rather than otherwise when Thomas declined to go round the gardens with them, saying that she preferred to remain in the study. Beth and Flip, their arms entwined, made straight for the tennis courts, examined the turf and markings, discussed Flip's chances in the end-of-term tournament, envied Betty Nutthall and recounted her victories, then capped their tour of the grounds with a round of visits to the studies of their friends.

On their return to No. 8 they found Jennifer displaying her new party frock to an admiring friend, and Thomas bending over an atlas. She had a party frock, she said, but felt an ass in it.

"Seen the new mistress?" inquired Beth.

"Rather," returned Jennifer.

"What's she like?"

"Oh, like all of them—no sight for sore eyes," said elegant Jennifer. "Can't do her hair."

"Is it short?"

"Eton-cropped, but badly, and it isn't her style."

"Is she young?"

"As mistresses go. They say she's a flat. She said 'Yes, dear' to Joan Flanders yesterday, when Joan asked for a wafer off an ice-cream cart on the way up from the station. Joan only did it for a rag, of course. One of the prefects passed by while she was licking it, and there wasn't half a row. Hope she takes our preps. What on earth are you doing, Flip Stoddart? Good Heavens! she's got a Shakespeare!"

"'If music be the food of love, play on,'" chanted Flip. There, I'll keep that in my head as a quotation for the great E. V. Didn't I tell you, Jen, I'm going to be the shining light at English this term? My

respected parent says I must improve, and just see me doing it on the first night of term. 'If music be the food of love, play on.' There's the sweet music of 'Dunces,' anyway," she continued, as the bell rang for prayers. "What do you say, Thomas? Did Shakespeare write it? Of course Shakespeare wrote it. Didn't think I made it up, did you? Why do you ask?"

"I . . . I like it, that's all," said Thomas. "I like music."

"Can you sing?"

"No," answered Thomas hastily, "no; not properly, you know."

"Rum bird!" ruminated Flip, as she followed her new companion into hall for prayers. "What on earth did she see to like in that line, 'If music be the food of love'?——"

"Hymn 272," announced the Head.

"Same old hymn, same old hall, same old everything," thought Flip. All the mistresses looking devoutly in their hymn-books. The more reason why Flip Stoddart should look about a little. She tried to wink at the various friends she had not yet

greeted, and, in the course of roving, her eyes lighted on the queer new girl. The new girl was singing and she looked happy, almost pretty.

It was very surprising.

CHAPTER III

SETTLING DOWN

SCHOOL soon settled into the regular routine and, as Beth remarked, it felt as though there never had been any holidays since the world began. Thomas, who had been well taught by a governess, was put into the same form as her study-mates, but she continued shy and incredibly clumsy. If there was a book to be knocked over, Thomas was there to do it. She dropped pencils and rulers just as mistresses were warming to their subjects; her pen spluttered innumerable blots. Yet she was painfully anxious to please. A sharp word from a mistress flustered her for the rest of the lesson. Flip, whose whim it had been to drop pencils and books merely for the pleasure of "getting a mistress's goat," as she elegantly put it, was nonplussed, as for

a time she, in her anxiety for Maisie, became a model of propriety. She could not drop rulers and books when she had to be constantly on the watch to retrieve Maisie's showering property.

The most irritable mistress on the staff was certainly Ethel V. Case, M.A., who took the Fourth Form for Latin and English, and who was familiarly known as "The Great E. V.," partly because of her height, and partly because it was rumoured that even Miss Courtney herself was afraid of her. A sudden noise acted upon her like a goad. Usually the Fourth respected this peculiarity, for E. V. had an exceedingly sharp tongue, and no girl liked to bear the lash of it alone. When it descended upon the whole form it could be borne with.

The Thursday after term began, the English lesson had been more than usually interesting. Even Flip had lent a languid ear, and Thomas had listened enthralled. E. V. could read poetry, and "Christabel," which the form was taking that day, seemed to be a favourite of hers. The Fourth-Form room

was utterly still. Only E. V.'s voice rose and fell :

" In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel !
Thou knowest to-night and wilt know to-morrow,
This mark of my shame, this seal of——"

Crash ! Thomas's pencil-box fell to the ground with a devastating clatter. An absent movement of her left hand had done the deed. Miss Case jumped and stopped reading.

" Who did that ? " she asked.

There was no answer at first.

" I did, Miss Case. Sorry ! " drawled Flip.

" Stand outside the door until the lesson is over."

Flip was moving to the door, devoutly hoping that Miss Barnet-Coldridge would not chance to pass by, when a timid voice came from Thomas :

" Please, Miss Case, it was I, not Philippa."

" Then why didn't you say so at once, and why did you say it was you, Philippa ? "

Flip flushed angrily. What an ass Thomas was! Why on earth didn't she speak at once or else not at all?

"Oh, I . . . I generally field Thomas's things, Miss Case, but just then I was listening to the poem instead of paying attention."

Miss Case smiled involuntarily. The crisis was over. Flip resumed her seat and the mistress resumed her reading. But the spell was broken and could not be cast anew. Thomas no longer listened to the poem. Instead, she stretched her hand under the desk and gave Flip's hand a grateful squeeze.

"Steady on," said Flip, fielding a falling pencil the while. "What's the matter with you?"

"You're a brick!" said Thomas.

"You'll find me a hard one if you go on being such an ass," was the uncompromising reply. Nevertheless Flip returned the hand-grip.

"Queer bird!" she said to herself.

Flip had never before been drawn to one of Thomas's type. Her normal reaction

would have been to despise her—a girl who couldn't play tennis, had never dreamt of riding a motor-bike, and was afraid of mistresses. Perhaps it was Thomas's inevitable tendency to get into scrapes that drew Flip to her, and a kind of pity for a girl who, with the best will in the world, seemed nevertheless to rouse the wrath of the powers that were. Flip, who had never felt a spasm of nervousness in her life, was amazed at the misery which Thomas seemed called upon to endure, and which was brought home to her by an incident which occurred a week later.

At Dunscombe considerable effort was made to train the girls in the social graces, and various study-groups were, at stated intervals, invited to tea with their house-mistress. No. 8, having a new inmate, received an early invitation, which they accepted. To say that they looked forward to the event with pleasure would be to exaggerate. Jennifer, in whom the social instincts were strong, and who loved pretty clothes, enjoyed the prospect of airing them. Beth and Flip were bored but resigned. It was therefore

a shock to Flip to learn that Thomas was thoroughly scared.

"But whatever are you frightened at?" said Beth, amazed. "Barney's scaring if you go for a row, but if you go to tea she is as sweet as butter."

"Honey, Beth, my dear—honey! Butter is a shiny substance, used sparingly."

"So was Barney's nose last time we went," interposed Jennifer. "Now listen! What are we going to talk about? Bags I the summer holidays."

"Bags I the tennis and the championship," said Flip.

"That leaves me with parents and the chances of the scholarship," said Beth ruefully. "What will you talk about, Thomas?"

"Shall I have to talk?" Thomas's voice sounded woebegone.

"Of course. We all have to join in. Proper thing. You must think of something to say beforehand. Don't say just *yes* and *no*. Barney doesn't like it. Flip made her laugh last time."

"Yes," said Flip, with a smile of gratifica-

tion at her triumph. "But she won't expect that in Thomas yet. Think of a safe topic for her."

"Her last school," suggested Beth.

"Idiot! She hasn't been to one. I know! The beauties of Dunscombe, and how impressed she is. That's the sort of thing. Now listen, Thomas; say how nice the park is, how you enjoy the view, how we've taken you down to the cove. Those things should be enough with a few yesses and noes. Barney isn't difficult. Here, stick your waist straight!"

Flip gave a tug to Thomas's unbecoming green frock, adjusted her own suspenders, and the four sallied forth to Miss Barnet-Coldridge's room.

For a time all went well. The girls sat elegantly in low chairs and handled their cups as to the manner born. Jennifer successfully dealt with the holidays; Flip followed on with the tennis, and then, in accordance with the pre-arranged plan, gave the cue to Thomas, who was to slide gracefully from the courts to the park and the amenities of Dunscombe. But alas! Flip's

cue was given in the critical stage of a Thomasonian sip of tea. The tea was hot. Thomas, alarmed at the double prospect of tea and talk, set down her cup too hastily, and in a moment the liquid was streaming over her frock and dripping down her legs. She stood up in consternation, upsetting as she did so her plate. The cream bun went rolling towards Flip, who promptly put out a foot and headed it off. Thomas stood for a moment with terrified eyes fixed on her house-mistress's face, turned round hopelessly, caught sight of the open French window, and darted out of it.

It was some moments before the shattered tea-party could pull itself together. Miss Barnet-Coldridge was the first to recover.

"These little accidents will happen," she said, with a rather forced smile.

"Shall I pick up the p—pieces, Miss Barnet-Coldridge?" said Flip, "and shall I go to Tom——Maisie, I mean?"

"Better finish your tea first, I think," said the mistress. "I'll see Maisie presently."

In an atmosphere of considerable restraint

the tea-party concluded, and the three girls rushed to their study. But there was no Thomas.

"Where can she be?" said Beth.

"We'd better divide and search the house and the grounds." Flip spoke purposefully. "She'll be better with one of us than by herself. Tell her, whoever finds her, that every one upsets tea once at least in Barney's room. Say anything to make her feel better."

For half an hour the three searched the likely places of the house and grounds, then returned to the study to confess failure. It was then Flip had an idea.

"Has she taken her purse?" she asked.

They dived into Thomas's drawer. No purse.

"Quick, give me a time-table," said Flip. "She'll make for the 9.10 at Crawley. She'll think she might meet somebody if she went to Dunscombe station. Run away? Of course she's run away. What do you expect of anybody like Thomas? The thing is to get her back before she makes an irretrievable

ass of herself. I shall take French leave with Enid Tamblyn's bike."

In a few minutes Flip was speeding far out of bounds on the way to Crawley. To get Thomas back before news of her flight spread through the school was her aim. In less than half an hour she perceived a solitary figure ahead.

"Hi, Thomas!" she yelled.

The Thomas who turned in answer to this summons was a pitiful object. She had not changed her frock, she had no hat, and she wore indoor shoes. She had cried until her eyes were red and swollen.

"I'm not *coming* back!" she said fiercely.

"Don't be a mutt! You haven't done anything. Why, at the last tea-party I upset the milk jug." (This was an exaggeration, for which Flip hoped to be forgiven.) "It's nothing at all."

"I'm such a clumsy fool," broke out Thomas. "My hands don't seem to be like anybody else's. It's always been so ever since I was a kid, and Mother can't

stand it. She says I'm worse than a boy and——"

"Rot!" said Flip. "But look here! There's no time to argue. Hop on my carrier. I'll get you back before any one knows."

"But I can't ride on a carrier," wailed Thomas.

"Get *on*!" said Flip. "Then you'll have found something you *can* do. Get *on*!" and, to her own surprise, Thomas not only got on but stuck on.

The return journey was performed successfully. The school was at prayers. Flip bundled an already considerably heartened Thomas into the study.

"Now stay there," she commanded. "I'm going to Barney. She'll be asking for you by this time. No, you ass! She wouldn't have rowed you. She'd have been as nice as anything. What's a blooming cup of tea? Here, wash your eyes. They're all coming out of prayers. I'll settle Barney."

Flip was gone, and in another minute was in the presence of her house-mistress.

Straight into the heart of the matter the girl blundered.

"Thomas—I . . . I mean Maisie—is in a stew, Miss Barnet-Coldridge, and I thought perhaps if you didn't send for her it would be better." Here Flip pulled herself up, realising the cheek of it.

"But I *have* sent for her," said the mistress.

"Yes, but I . . . I didn't give it her. I mean the message."

"Where did Maisie go?" asked Miss Barnet-Coldridge, looking at Flip fixedly. She had learnt that Maisie was not to be found, and had missed the two girls at prayers.

Flip was silent.

"Was she in the grounds?"

Flip looked up desperately. "She's a good sort, Miss Barnet-Coldridge. But she's a bit of an ass. I'll look after her if you'll leave it to me, and not say anything to her."

The house-mistress seemed to understand. She dismissed Flip in a friendly manner, telling her to assure Maisie that no one was

in the least annoyed with her, and that it was nothing to fret herself about.

That evening at dinner she was heard to remark to the great E. V. that there were likeable points about Philippa Stoddart. E. V. sniffed.

CHAPTER IV

FLIP TASTES STRANGE DISCIPLINE

MISS BARNET-COLDRIDGE would perhaps have thought her colleague's sniff better justified than her own commendation could she have seen Flip bending over a letter a few days afterwards. Her eyes were alight with mischief and anticipation. The letter she held in her hand was from Tim, at school, not three miles from Dunscombe. It read as follows :

" DEAR FLIP,—This is to ask could you come and dress up as me, and take my place for a lesson next Saturday morning — the last lesson ? It's drawing. If you just draw badly, Billings, who is an awful ass, will never know. You said you'd like to try it, and no one at home ever knows us when we have each other's clothes on. Hitchens junior would meet you in the old club-house, just to the right of the new pavilion. I'd leave

clothes for you there, and you'd just stick them on, leave yours, and Hitch would take you up to drawing and bring you down again. Be a sport! I frightfully want to cut that lesson, and I know you're free early Saturday mornings. I've got the spares for Rex. Cheerio! TIM."

Here was an adventure! Flip had for years longed, on the strength of her boyish appearance, to penetrate into the interior of her brother's school. To a casual observer the twins were almost indistinguishable one from another. They had the same black, curling, close-cropped hair; the same poise of the head and graceful motion; the same blue eyes darkening to violet when they were angry; the same gay smile. Flip, to Tim's annoyance, was an inch the taller, and Tim, to Flip's annoyance, had the better muscle; but such difference did not impair the general effect of close likeness. Tim, dressed in Flip's clothes, had received from Aunt Clarissa lectures on ladylike behaviour intended for his sister. Flip, in her brother's togs, had been exhorted by the Colonel to be a man and shoot straight. As small children they

had delighted in bringing about endless complications, and now here was a chance for good fun. Flip longed ardently for Saturday morning.

The Fourth at "Dunces" were free at eleven o'clock on Saturday mornings, whereas at St. Edmund's they went on until one. Flip's plan was to ask permission to cycle to Penarthon Cove to picnic with her study-mates. The three were to go to Penarthon, while Flip was to ride on to St. Edmund's, change according to plan, and beard Billings in his lesson.

Apprised of the design, Jennifer and Beth only wished they were to attempt it, but Maisie did her utmost to dissuade her new friend.

"If this man Billings finds you out, just think how awful you'll feel," she said. "And you, and your brother too, will get into the most frightful row."

Flip declared this was just the fun of it, and that nothing was any fun unless there was risk. She refused to listen to Maisie's pleadings, and at half-past eleven on Saturday morning she arrived, panting, at the shed in

the wood indicated by Tim. Hitchens junior, a neighbour of the Stoddarts and a great friend of the twins, awaited her with a bundle. Hastily she made her toilet, and when she stepped out Hitch assured her that Billy'd never twig. "Just make your knees a bit muddy," he said, "and your hands."

Flip displayed her grubby palms. "Won't they do?" she asked.

Hitch grinned.

"Rather," he said, "but just do your knees a bit, then we must buck up."

Together they ran towards the school and joined a crowd of boys.

"Don't talk to anybody," had been Hitchens' advice. "If any one gets troublesome, just land him one in the eye. That'll let him know you're Tim Stoddart all right." Flip doubled her fists threateningly, but hoped in her heart that she would not have to give this proof of her identity.

In the class-room everything went more smoothly than Flip could have thought possible. The only thing that amused her was the nuts. Nuts had been a rage in the

Fourth at St. Edmund's, and so bold had the boys become in eating them in class that Jacks, the Classics man, had made a raid and deposited a goodly heap on his desk, where he left them. Billings, entering, remarked casually, knowing perfectly well what had happened, "Oh, you chaps, thanks for the nuts," and there he sat at the desk cracking and eating them.

The boys were wild enough, but Flip was ready to chortle with joy. She must introduce nuts at "Dunces." She fancied Miss Barnet-Coldridge in Billy's place and smiled to herself.

"You seem happy, Stoddart, my boy. Not *your* nuts, I presume?"

"No," said Flip.

The form looked up in surprise.

"*Sir*," hissed Hitch, giving her ankle a warning kick.

"No, sir," said Flip meekly, caressing her left ankle and registering the word for future use.

What a noise boys made, she thought, but she liked it. She was congratulating herself that the lesson was nearly at an end, and that

she had come safely through, when Billings said suddenly :

" By the way, Mr. Henryson wishes to see " —he consulted a piece of paper in his hand— " Hitchens and Stoddart at one o'clock. Better hurry along, you two."

Flip rose in genuine consternation, but, observing Hitchens' studied nonchalance, carefully imitated him. It was evidently " not done " to show fear at such a summons. The two conspirators reached the corridor safely.

" Here's a go ! " said Hitch.

" My little hat ! " said Flip.

" Somebody must have seen us," said Hitch. " Unless," he added reflectively, " the Head is giving us the whack for breaking the dining-room window last week. We did, but he has been away, and Stod and I thought he was still away. Suppose he pitches into us ! Are you game ? "

" Yes," said Philippa firmly.

" Ever had it before ? "

" No," she was bound to admit. " We don't at our place."

Hitch looked contemptuous.

"Well, if we get it hot, don't blub. Stoddart wouldn't."

Flip gazed at him witheringly. "No fear," she said.

"One thing, if he canes us for the window, he won't find out you're not Stoddart. Never looks at a chap he canes; it's my belief he don't like doing it."

This conversation had brought the pair to the Head's door. They knocked and entered.

"Hm! Stoddart and Hitchens," said Mr. Henryson. "You broke one of the dining-room windows on Saturday, I understand."

"Yes, sir," said Hitchens.

"And on Monday you were out of bounds, and got into trouble with Sir James Bowden's keeper."

This was a blow to Hitch. How had the Head got to know this, he wondered.

"Yes, sir," he said gloomily.

"And on Wednesday you cut last lesson and went crabbing with old Salter. Is that so?"

"Did old Salt blab, sir?" asked Hitchens, forgetting himself in the interest of the question.

"I did not get my information from Salter," said Mr. Henryson drily. "I am asking if the said information is correct?"

"Yes, sir," said Hitch, still more gloomily.

"And you were there, Stoddart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Henryson. "I must put a stop to that kind of thing, I suppose. You knew the penalty. You first, Hitchens."

Flip could not help wishing she had been first. The cane seemed to fall with such a swish on Hitchens' upturned palm. One, two, three cuts—and Flip grew nervous. Would she ever be able to keep her hand out like Hitch, who never flinched? Suppose she drew her hand back! Suppose—unendurable thought—she cried!

"Other hand," said Mr. Henryson.

Hitch clenched his right hand and held out his left.

"Now you, Stoddart."

Flip took her place beside the headmaster.

"Put out your hand. Further out."

She held out her right hand, and the cane fell burningly along the palm; the second

stroke followed the wake of the first. She flinched, and the third stroke cut across her fingers, making them quiver, for all her efforts.

"Other hand," said Mr. Henryson laconically.

She stretched it out and watched the flexible cane as though fascinated. It was like a snake or a thin yellow flame. She heard it hiss and kept herself still under its scorching tongue three times, and the punishment was over.

Mr. Henryson threw aside the cane. "You may go now," he said.

"Doesn't go in for pi-jaw, does he?" said Hitch as they reached the corridor. "You were a brick, Flip," he went on. "I'll tell Stod. You never flinched."

"I did a bit for the second one on the first hand," said Flip.

"Nothing to notice," said Hitch magnanimously. "I've seen chaps do heaps worse than that—chaps that have been trained to it, mind you—and yours was your first try. You never turned a hair for the last three, and they were the hottest of all. The old

man was getting into his style. Not so bad, is he ? "

" No," said Flip. This, it seemed, was a form of sport.

" Was it pretty hot as things go ? " she asked with some curiosity.

" As hot as ever I've had it," said Hitch handsomely. And Flip was elated. She made for the shed, re-clothed herself in maidenly array, and with her burning hands pleasantly soothed by the cold metal of the handle-bars, which she held firmly for that purpose, she pedalled swiftly to Penarthon.

Here, however, she found that her troubles were by no means at an end, for on the beach she saw not three but five figures. Miss Clemence and Miss MacCarthy had decided to spend the afternoon at Penarthon, and were chatting to the occupants of No. 8.

" Now what excuse have they made for me ? " Flip said to herself. " I'd give something to know. How am I to guess what story they've made up ? I'll be putting my foot in it."

She approached slowly.

"Oh, here's Philippa!" exclaimed Miss MacCarthy. "Have you found it, Philippa?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss MacCarthy," said Flip, taking the cue, but wishing devoutly that she knew what she had lost.

"Where was it?"

This was a puzzler.

"Was it where we thought, by the hay-rick?" put in Beth swiftly.

"Yes," said Flip.

"You haven't it on," said Miss Clemence. "You haven't lost it again, surely?"

Instinctively Flip's hand sought the neck of her gym blouse, and the cold crept down her spine. Her brooch, with the Dunscombe motto on it! Fool that she was! She must have left it in the shed! Her profound surprise and agitation stood her in excellent stead. No acting could have equalled it.

"Why, yes. I've lost it again!" She spoke slowly. "It must be bewitched." Then, with dawning hope: "I'll ride back and look for it again. I . . . I know precisely where I must have lost it, and I don't want to lose it. I pumped up and——"

"Is it far?" asked Miss MacCarthy. "I'll walk back with you."

"It's a good way, Miss MacCarthy," said Flip desperately. "I'd better go alone."

"No," said Miss MacCarthy decidedly; "you can't go scouring about the country by yourself. You know that you shouldn't have gone back by yourself before. Come along; we shall soon find it, if you think you know the place."

Flip gave herself up for lost, and mistress and pupil commenced their walk together. That the Mac should have turned up at Penarthon at this unseasonable moment—the girls of "Dunces" never guessed that their "chance" meetings with mistresses on their excursions were carefully planned by the Head—was infuriating. That Flip, of all people, should have to do the polite for goodness knows how long! Beth would have enjoyed it. Beth was keen on Miss MacCarthy. But Flip's mind was anxious, and her hands were sore. She trudged along rather gloomily.

On reaching a likely spot she explained that here she had stopped to pump up, and

that here, if anywhere, she thought the brooch would be found. The two stooped to examine the dust, and were thus engaged when a bicycle bell sounded behind them. Flip knew perfectly well there was no brooch in that dust. She raised her head to extract what amusement she could from the sight of the passer-by, and found herself face to face with—Mr. Billings!

He dismounted from his machine, and raised his hat to Miss MacCarthy, with whom, it seemed, he was on friendly terms.

"How do you do, Miss MacCarthy?" he said. Then he looked at Flip, and his amazement showed on his face.

"Stoddart!" he began.

"I'm Tim's sister . . . sir," said Flip. The remembrance of Hitchens' toe in sharp contact with her ankle prompted.

"This is Philippa Stoddart," chimed in Miss MacCarthy.

"Oh, I remember Philippa. You told me once your twin brother was at St. Edmund's, didn't you? You must be very much alike."

Billings was looking at Flip curiously.

Perhaps something in the accent of the "Sir" roused his suspicions.

"Do you like nuts?" he said suddenly.

Flip grinned. The remembrance of Billings and the nuts was too much for her.

"Do you?" she parried.

It was now the turn of Mr. Billings to smile while Miss MacCarthy looked on in surprise.

"By the way," said Billings, "I have a Dunscombe brooch here. I picked it up"—he looked intently at Flip, who held her breath—"not far from here."

Flip flashed him a grateful smile. What a sport he was, after all! She took the brooch, and the three walked together towards Penarthon. Arrived at a tiny shop in the village, Miss MacCarthy entered it to buy some buns, leaving the other two alone together.

"By the way, Miss . . . er . . . Philippa," said the master, "don't play that little game again. It might not come off so well another time. Let me see your hands."

Flip showed them marked with the cane.

"You didn't come off lightly this time!

I shouldn't join in the game another day. I . . . er . . . yes, it is very unusual to find it in these parts," he said, changing his voice as Miss MacCarthy reappeared. " I suppose I must be getting on."

He raised his hat and was soon speeding away from them. " He deserves a five-h.p. Triumph instead of a push-bike," Flip said to herself. From that time onward Billings was a hero in her eyes. Without rebuke, Tim never referred to him in her presence as " that frightful ass."

CHAPTER V

A PROBLEM OF DRESS

"I LOVE the dancing; it's my frocks make me feel such a fool!" Thomas was speaking in a No. 8 which looked not unlike an Eastern bazaar. Three frocks—green, blue, and yellow—were exposed to view, and No. 8 was sitting in judgment on them.

"I should wear the yellow," said Beth.

"And I should wear the blue," said Flip.

"And I should wear the green," mocked Jennifer. "I tell you what it is, Thomas; they don't *suit* you, my boy. You aren't the kind of person for fantastic frocks, and your mother ought to know it."

"Shut up, Jen!" said Flip angrily. "You look all right in the blue, Tom; you do, honest!"

Jennifer pulled a face, and Thomas looked near tears.

"Wear one of mine," said Beth. "Mine are plain enough. It's a *plain* one she wants, isn't it, Jen?"

"Yes; she'd look all right in your white one or my cream. You can have that if you like, Thomas," said the oracle magnanimously.

"It's decent of you," said Thomas, cheering up a little. "But I must wear one of my own. You see, my mother's coming."

The girls said no more. A garden party was to be held at Dunscombe on the Head's birthday, and folk-dancing and Greek dancing were to be the chief attractions. Thomas especially liked both the music and the dances, but was betrayed into self-consciousness by her clothes. Never was schoolgirl fitted with clothes so unsuitable. Her frocks, which would have suited a fair fluffy child of eight, looked ridiculous on her sturdy person, and Thomas was preternaturally alive to the ridiculous.

"I shall hate the party," she said to Flip, "and Mother will think I'm a clumsy ass because I'm sure I can't dance in one of those frocks, and if I wear one of Jen's she'll ask me why, and——"

"Well, let your mother ask why, and tell her you don't like your own frocks," said practical Flip.

"Oh, I *couldn't* do that. You see, Mother's one of these very sensitive people. If only I'd been pretty!"

Flip snorted.

"Rot!" she said. "But I've got an idea. You tell Jen to have her cream frock ironed in case you want it, and leave the rest to me."

Leaving the rest to Flip seemed to involve one or two visits to the lab, one or two heart-to-heart chats with Miss Clemence, the new Science mistress, and an array of little bottles in No. 8.

"I'm keen on Science and the pursuit of truth," announced Flip. "Science is the religion of to-day," she went on glibly. "Always experiment. Never take for granted nor accept other people's results. Test! Test! Experiment!" She tapped the little bottles affectionately.

The day before the party she ordered Thomas to lay out her frocks on the back of a chair and then to make herself scarce.

In five minutes Flip, with three utterly ruined frocks on her arm, was making her way to the Science mistress's room.

"I'm frightfully sorry, Miss Clemence," she said. "I've made a mess of things. I was trying the experiment you told us about, and somehow it all overflowed over Maisie Crantock's frocks. Look!"

She held up the three frocks one after the other. The green one was deplorable, the blue more deplorable, the yellow most deplorable.

Miss Clemence blinked.

"But——" she began.

"I was after Truth," interrupted Flip. "I was just nabbing him by the tail when my hand slipped."

"But——" again attempted the mistress.

"It's awfully difficult—the pursuit of Science," Flip went on. "I feel like that man you told us about—the Frenchman who went on glazing pots, though he had to burn up his furniture and all, and his wife went for him. You remember, Miss Clemence, you told us about him last lesson?"

Miss Clemence was young and guileless,

and "trained." She was enthusiastic in the cause of education. She had cast her bread upon the waters when she told the tale of the energetic potter; it had returned unto her after many days. She forgot the destruction of the frocks. Her heart went out to Flip.

"Never mind, dear," she said. "I will explain to Miss Barnet-Coldridge, and no doubt it will be all right. You must be more careful another time, though. Has Maisie another frock she can wear to the party?"

"She can have one of Jennifer's, Miss Clemence," said Flip joyfully, as she bade the Science mistress adieu. She knew she did not relish the interview which she foresaw with her house-mistress, but the party would be over by then. Sufficient unto the day! She repaired to No. 8.

Thomas had returned, and with fearful joy was awaiting Flip.

"They are gone, Flip," she said. "Every bit of them."

"Well, you didn't expect me to leave you the bottom hems as a keepsake, I suppose,"

said Flip. "They've gone, all right. A glorious end. Dead in the pursuit of Science.

"I say! But won't you get into a most frightful row?"

"Not I," said Flip. "You leave it to your wise aunt, my child! I've never seen anything funnier than the Clem, and I believe I can manage Barney all right if I set about it properly. You hurry up and dress in Jen's frock. Oh, and introduce me to your mother, and I'll explain about your glad rags."

"Don't say I didn't like them," said Thomas anxiously.

"No, of course not." Flip knitted her brows. How was she to explain to the poetic Mrs. Crantock that her daughter's frocks were all wrong?

That they were all wrong she felt the more convinced when she saw Thomas arrayed in Jennifer's plain but excellently cut cream frock. The heavy *crêpe-de-Chine* hung gracefully. The rolled collar and loosely knotted tie suited Thomas to perfection.

"I feel jolly in this," she said. "It was sporting of you to lend it, Jen."

It was indeed more sporting than Thomas could fully realise. Herself indifferent to clothes except when their fluffiness made her feel foolish, she would never realise what it had cost the clothes-loving Jennifer to lend her prettiest frock to a person who would possibly upset a plate of strawberries and cream into the lap of it.

When all four girls were dressed they descended together to the garden. Flip's aunt had come over for the party, and, languid though she was, Flip always felt, on such occasions, proud of her. She could be trusted to say and do the right thing, whereas Thomas's mother, it was soon apparent, could be relied upon to say and do the wrong. To start with, she looked bizarre in a shapeless wrap-gown of Eastern style. She could not move without being noticed, and her high-pitched voice emphasised her strident personality. She kissed her daughter in one breath and began to criticise her in the next. Thomas, who had entered the garden with a careless joyousness new to her, retreated into her clumsy self, introduced her study-mates awkwardly, and, to Jennifer's concern,

stood there twisting in embarrassment the edges of her tie.

It was a relief to all when the music began to play " Picking up sticks." Flip said :

" You're in this, Thomas. I'll look after your mother, and you come back to us when it's over. Don't forget in the 'Sheepskin Hey' the third person twirls first, and in the second figure top couple slips inside."

The sets were already forming when Thomas ran to take her place with Jennifer as top couple in one of the five sets who were to interpret this rather intricate country dance. Flip felt more nervous for Thomas than she had ever felt for herself. " Sheepskin Hey " was so tricky. But Thomas was moving rhythmically with the others. By the time " *siding* " was reached she was dancing excellently.

" Jolly good, isn't she ? " said Flip enthusiastically to Mrs. Crantock. " And doesn't she look jolly in Jen's frock ? I'm frightfully sorry I made a mess of her others, Mrs. Crantock ; but . . . there ! she's done the 'Sheepskin' all right, thank goodness ! They're going through the whole thing again.

That frock does suit her though, doesn't it ? "

Mrs. Crantock adjusted her monocle.

" She certainly looks better than usual, poor child, but she is very plain and clumsy. No air of distinction at all. And though I do what I can with her clothes, she doesn't wear them with any effect. I really haven't time to see to new frocks for her. When one is dependent on inspiration, one has to serve the Muse with faithfulness. The Muse is a most exacting goddess, you know. Do you write ? "

Flip stared, uncomprehending.

" Do you worship the Muse ? Many girls of your age write verse."

Flip's stare became more blank.

" You're shy about it, but no doubt you've made lines to some adored mistress. Many children have published verses, and some are perfectly sweet. I hoped Morello would be poetic, but she, poor child, is the essence of prose. Such hands and such feet ! You see I fall into rhyme. I lisped in numbers for—— Good gracious, Morello—steady, my dear child ! "

Thomas burst in upon them. Her eyes were dancing.

"I did it all right, Flip; did 'Sheepskin' like an angel. Did you see me? Didn't make a single slip. It is glorious dancing. The next is yours. Don't forget the men cross first in 'Hey, boys,' and the second time the women cross first."

It was Thomas's turn to be anxious now as Flip took her place in a set of four for "Hey, boys, up go we." Anxiety was needless. Flip, at all manner of physical movement, was unsurpassed.

"Doesn't she set and turn single gloriously?" said ardent Thomas as she watched her friend.

"Not quite the adverb I should have chosen," said Mrs. Crantock. "Choose the *mot juste*, dear child. Now I should have thought that at a school like this one of the first aims would have been to give pupils a sense of language. Your friend's reiterated use of the word *jolly* agonised me. When one is sensitive to——"

"But Flip does dance gloriously," said Thomas, a hint of mutiny in her voice.

"I hope, dear child," said Mrs. Crantock, "that school won't make you vulgarly assertive. A beautiful woman should be inconspicuous, a modest violet. . . . Let us join Miss Courtney, whom I see in the distance. I will see your friend again later."

Mrs. Crantock, with every eye upon her, trailed her gorgeous person to the other side of the lawn.

Dance succeeded dance, and, in spite of the vagaries of Mrs. Crantock, our four of No. 8 were radiantly happy. If a shadow sometimes passed over Flip's bright face as she thought of the impending interview with her house-mistress, the sunshine swiftly chased it away. The music was good, the lawn springy. Ices and strawberries-and-cream were not to be despised. The four enjoyed the passing moments as they flew, and tasted their sweets again as they plied their brushes at night—or, rather, while Jennifer plied her brush and the others watched her and gave their short hair occasional dabs with a comb. Mrs. Crantock would have shuddered at the epithets. *Divine* was the least they

could say of Arline Chapman, the head girl of "Dunces."

"Did you see her in the solo jig?" asked Beth.

"When I'm in the Sixth I shall do a jig," said Flip.

"Miss Barnet-Coldridge wishes to see you in her room now, Philippa Stoddart. What have you been up to?"

It was the said Arline, who had been taking coffee with her house-mistress and had been sent to fetch the erring Flip.

"Oh, nothing," said Flip uneasily. "Au revoir, you folk! Don't stay up for me. I shall probably sleep with Barney."

With an airiness which was more assumed than real, Flip departed for her interview. What should she say? No use to talk to Barney of the pursuit of truth. She racked her brains in the corridor, but nothing came; she racked them outside the door, but nothing came; seated opposite the mistress her head was still a blank.

"I hear that you have been exerting yourself in the cause of science and have met with an accident, Philippa."

"Yes, Miss Barnet-Coldridge," said Flip, thinking what a mistake it was for a school-mistress to have a double-barrelled name.

"Maisie's frocks can probably be repaired."

"Oh no, Miss Barnet-Coldridge; I saw to that!" Flip paused, perceiving her mistake.

"I see," said the mistress; "that's what I wanted to know. Hadn't you better explain?"

"Well, Miss Barnet-Coldridge, you must admit the frocks were a washout. Tom—I mean Maisie—looked an ass in them."

"So you took the law into your own hands?

Flip nodded, and listened while the mistress delivered a lecture on the dangers of this.

"Yes, I see, Miss Barnet-Coldridge, but as man to—I mean woman to woman—what are we to do about it? Anybody can see that Maisie's mother is a most frightful ass."

"Philippa!"

"I mean a . . . a . . . difficult lady."

The mistress, who had suffered from the "difficult lady" that afternoon, and had heard her referred to by a member of the staff as "that poisonous female," made no further protest.

"When she's free of the Muse"—Miss Barnet-Coldridge recognised this and smiled—"she'll plump more lampshades on Maisie, who'll feel an ass again. I was thinking, Miss Barnet-Coldridge, couldn't you buy Maisie's dresses? You buy Beth's, and Jen Holloway, who knows all about clothes, says you've got topping taste."

The house-mistress was sufficiently woman to appreciate this artless compliment, but she did not reveal the fact to Flip, nor did she mention that the problem of Maisie's dress had been exercising the minds of Miss Courtney and herself. She concluded her sermon on the danger of girls taking the law into their own hands. She exhorted Flip not to act impulsively and destroy property without thought, and finally added, with a twinkle in her eye, that she thought Maisie would not be worried by any more lampshades.

The next night she was again heard to murmur at dinner that there were likeable points about Philippa Stoddart. Miss Case again sniffed. Miss Clemence babbled happily of Science.

CHAPTER VI

ATMOSPHERIC DISTURBANCES

IT may have been the heat. Or perhaps the term was growing stale, since it was not near enough to the beginning for freshness nor far enough from the end for joyous anticipations of holidays. Storm-clouds were gathering in No. 8.

Beth and Flip were friends of three years' standing. Adventurous episodes had linked them in the Lower Third, and the links had grown firmer with the passing of the years at "Dunces." Jennifer had joined them—they hardly knew how—in a less intimate union; for Jennifer was curiously aloof, and too much absorbed in herself for close friendship. She was a loyal companion, without small meannesses and jealousies; neither demanding nor bestowing ardent affection, but maintaining an even and easy comrade-

ship to which both Flip and Beth turned as a refuge from themselves and from each other.

It was not surprising that the introduction of Thomas into the camp should cause some friction, and that the friction should be chiefly between Thomas and Beth. Beth was naturally tidy and neat. She loved to classify. Thomas was untidy to a degree. She never could remember where she dropped things, and on one occasion threw the pencil she had sharpened into the fire instead of the chippings. Useless for Beth to lay down laws as to whose quarter of the room was whose. Thomas's things would overflow from her own realm into Beth's, and Beth's rulers and pencils would disappear in an instant, never to be returned. Added to this was Flip's obvious liking for Thomas. In altercations she took Thomas's part, partly because, to her mind, Thomas was the weaker brother, and it was Flip's natural tendency to defend the weak; partly because she felt that her friendship with Beth was so sure that nothing could rupture it. The trouble came to

a head over the affair of the botany book.

Beth was keen on Botany and keen, too, on Miss MacCarthy, the Botany mistress. In the autumn term the girls had been told to choose a tree for special study throughout the year. They were to visit their chosen tree at close intervals, observe the fall of the leaf, the winter buds, the fresh twigs of the spring, the flowers and fruit. Their observations were to be recorded in a special book, interleaved with drawing-paper on which drawings and paintings could be made.

Beth and Flip had both started out on their researches with immense enthusiasm. Their delight in the crisp new notebooks and the novelty of the work had been overflowing. They had chosen for study an ash and an elm growing side by side in the school garden, and at first Flip's devotion to her ash had been no less ardent than Beth's to her elm. Every change had been carefully noted, and long hours had been spent beautifying the new books with colour and pencil. But whereas Beth's interest had grown stronger as the

year passed through its changing seasons, Flip's had rapidly waned. By the end of a month her tree had become "my beastly ash."

"Beth, if you're going to see your giddy elm, cast half an eye on my beastly ash, will you?" and Flip had gone off to hockey, lacrosse, or tennis, according to the season, while Beth watched the trees.

The result was that Flip's notebook showed a grand beginning, followed by a series of perfunctory entries made under protest; while Beth's book had become a thing of real interest and beauty. For her the elm had assumed a personality. The fissured bark, the stiff rough leaves, the confiding brown buds, the early sober flowers and bunched fruits had become loved characteristics. She carried the shape of her tree in her eye, compared it with other elms, and sought to reproduce it in her book. Never would she forget her delight when, in the play the class was studying for a particular term, she came across a reference to "the barky fingers of the elm." This, with other quotations, she had printed, with an artist's attention

to fine lettering, into the pages of her book. And now the work neared completion. Soon the books were to be given in to Miss MacCarthy. A prize had been offered for the best book, but it was not the prize upon which Beth's mind was bent. She wanted Miss MacCarthy's praise. Partly because she admired Miss MacCarthy, and partly because she had a yearning for appreciation of her work by one who understood the labour and joy of it. Miss MacCarthy would understand, whereas Flip and Jennifer would never do so. As for Thomas—Beth never dreamt of displaying her work to Thomas—a fact which goes to show the gulf between them.

On the afternoon of June the fifteenth, the day before books were to be given in, Flip, Thomas, and Jennifer went to the cove to bathe, leaving Beth to delightful hours with her work. Caressingly she added the finishing strokes, rubbing out a pencil-mark here, touching up an inscription there, now deepening a colour in a painting, now altering a word in a sentence. By tea-time she had finished, and laying her book on the table

with some of her other exercises, she went to the dining-room with a happy sense of achievement. To-morrow her book would go in. What would Miss MacCarthy say? Would she make any special comment? She knew Beth was doing the elm; had said she would be interested to see the result. Perhaps she would be really pleased.

"Dreaming of praise to come?"

Flip came flying down the corridor, a bathing towel over her shoulder, her dark hair curling tightly with the damp, her face aglow.

"If she doesn't say it's tophole she ought to, Beth; that's all I know," teased Flip. "If I'd gazed at my beastly ash as you've stared at your giddy elm I should be sprouting little ash-buds by this time. Just fancy yourself with a cute little elm branch cropping out between your shoulder-blades! I haven't made an entry since Lord knows how long, but I shall tell the Mac I left something to her imagination. Come on! We're going to Margaret Chelmsford after Prep. I've told her you would come too."

"'Sh! 'sh! No talking in the corridors, please! You again, Philippa Stoddart."

It was a prefect. The two friends subsided, or rather Flip subsided and followed Beth silently to Prep, after which all the occupants of No. 8 adjourned for revels with Margaret Chelmsford and her associates of No. 10. From this sanctum they were only ejected by a prefect at bedtime.

Evening revels and a morning of hard work left even Beth little time to dream of her book. It was not until after dinner the following day that she said to Flip:

"Let's give in our books now and get them off our chests. Hester Prideaux is form leader this week, and she'll take them all to Miss MacCarthy at five. Let's go and put ours out now."

"Right-o!" said Flip. "Mac will squirm over mine. It won't get me a good report, that's certain. By the way, I mustn't forget that good report I've got to get in English. Have to sit up soon. Here's mine—look! Let's go and give them in now."

But Beth was rummaging among the books on her table.

"Hang it all, I can't find it," she said.

"Must be there. Under your arithmetic, is it?"

"No, that's my science note-book," said Beth.

"Is it in your drawer with your French?"

"No; I've looked."

Flip let her rummage a little longer, then crossed the room to her side.

"Must be there," she said.

"Well, find it then."

"All right! You get out of the way."

Flip looked through all Beth's books, but nowhere could she find a trace of the missing article.

"Dashed funny!" she said.

Thomas and Jennifer, who were hastily re-writing a returned lesson, looked up.

"What's dashed funny? Can't you find it?" asked Jennifer.

"No," snapped Beth. "Have I been able to find anything lately?"

"I haven't touched anything, honest Injun!" said Thomas, with the quickness of the often guilty.

"Of course not." Beth spoke with sarcasm. "You never do touch anything, but things are never where I leave them. *There* it is—look! on your table!" She pounced on a book.

"That's my own botany book," said Thomas.

Beth threw it down impatiently.

"Well, what have you done with mine? You must have taken it, thinking it was yours."

"I haven't," said Thomas.

"You must have," retorted Beth.

"If she says she hasn't——" interposed Flip.

Beth turned round like a whirlwind.

"Yes, of course you take her part. You always do. I don't know what it's like since she's been here. Nothing's ever right. I'm not going to sit down under this. She's lost my book, and she'll jolly well have to find it."

"But if she——" began Flip once more.

"Who had my knife and my *Merchant* and my French book?" cried Beth fiercely. "I can't keep anything. Here's

one of her beastly notebooks on my table now. Here! Take it! And you can look for my book till you find it. I'm going out."

Beth threw the book at Thomas and rushed out of the room, banging the door behind her.

"Well, well!" Flip sighed; "this comes of excessive devotion to a giddy elm. Now listen, Thomas, are you sure you haven't touched the book?"

"I——I'm quite sure I haven't," stammered Thomas, who had grown white.

"You haven't given in any books to-day?"

"My Latin book."

"What colour?"

"Green."

"Beth's book was green, and you'll jolly well have to go to E. V. and ask if you've given in the wrong book."

"Oh, Flip, I can't go to E. V.'s room! I just can't!"

"You can, and you must, and that's an end of that!"

Here was an ordeal for timid Thomas, but

she was hounded out of the room by Flip and sent on her unwilling errand.

In the meantime Flip and Jennifer searched the room. High and low they hunted. Waste-paper basket, drawers, bookshelves were ransacked. No corner was left unscanned. They even took up the hearthrug, but with no result. Thomas returned to find the room in a state of chaos.

"I've been," she said. "E. V. wasn't half mad, but she let me look through the pile on her shelf, and I've given in the right book."

Flip and Jennifer looked at each other hopelessly.

"Is it awfully important?" asked Thomas.

"Beth will break her heart if she loses it. You know how keen she is on the Mac; and really her work was topping, wasn't it, Jen? Thomas, are you sure you haven't taken it up and dropped it down somewhere? You know how careless you are over things. Think! Do try and think."

"I haven't touched one of Beth's things since the time when I bagged her *Merchant of Venice* and forgot to return it, and she was so furious with me. Honestly and truly I haven't."

"Hush! Here she is!" said Flip.

Beth entered slowly and halted in the confusion of the room. The others looked at her uncomfortably.

"Well, was it in the waste-paper basket, or has she used it for a door-mat?"

"Oh, Beth, honestly I haven't seen it," said Thomas pitifully.

"Haven't you found it, then?"

"No," said Flip; "as a matter of fact, we haven't. But it must be here, of course. You go down and have a bathe, Beth, and we'll have another hunt. Of course it's here. Things can't disappear like that."

"They can when some people are about."

"Oh, shut up, Beth!" said Flip irritably. "Do leave the kid alone."

Beth compressed her lips but said nothing. Instead, she joined the search, and once more

every nook and cranny of the room was ransacked. It was now nearing five o'clock.

"You'd better go and give yours in," said Beth. "There's no point in yours being late because mine is lost. But for Heaven's sake don't say to Mac I've lost my book. You know how she hates anything like that. Perhaps she won't look at them for a bit, and by then mine may have turned up."

"Of course I shan't say anything," said Flip. "Let's look through the drawers again. It simply must be here somewhere."

The search was resumed. Even Jennifer was stirred out of her wonted calm. Prep time came and the girls adjourned.

"Ask the others in the form if they've seen it?"

The question was put to various members of the class, but with no result. Beth even chalked a notice on the board, and when the mistress in charge entered asked her to put the question to the whole form. But no one replied. No one had seen anything of the book.

At supper Beth said little. In gloomy silence the four repaired to the untidy study and engaged in a final hunt.

"It's no use," said Beth at last. "It's simply disappeared. I suppose I thought too much about it."

Flip's heart was full. As long as Beth had raved at Thomas she had been ready to take the weaker girl's part, but now her feeling was all for her old friend. It was intolerable that the patient work of months should disappear. Perhaps Thomas had taken it in her absent-minded fashion and made away with it somehow.

"Thomas, are you quite sure you haven't touched it?" Flip asked again.

Thomas, overcome with the feeling that the tide was setting dead against her, began to cry.

"I didn't, I didn't. I've never touched any of Beth's things since the *Merchant*. I never knew anything about the book."

"That's just it," said Flip quickly. "You may have taken it up thinking it was an ordinary exercise book."

"I didn't—I didn't!"

Here Jennifer took up the tale.

"Stop blubbing, Thomas," she said. "There's no earthly use in that, and you aren't six years of age. Pull yourself together and tell us exactly what you've done since you got up this morning."

Step by step she forced the girl to recall her movements, but nothing seemed to throw any light on the loss of the book.

"You say you ran in hurriedly to get your books for Latin," said Beth. "Are you sure you didn't take it then? Latin books are green."

"I made her go and ask E. V.," said Flip. "There's no hope in that direction."

"Well, it's no use to bother any more about it," said Beth at last, wearily. "It may turn up to-morrow. If not, I must put up with it, I suppose. Good-night."

There seemed nothing for it but to go to bed. Never had No. 8 retired so soberly, nor did the next day amend matters. Their gaiety was in eclipse. The book could not

be found. Thomas, heavy-hearted, went about her work dejectedly, and Flip in her sympathy for Beth hardly noticed her newer friend. Two days thus came and went. On the third day Miss MacCarthy was to take the form for Botany. What was Beth to say? She knew what the comment would be if she admitted the loss of her book. Miss MacCarthy detested carelessness. Herself naturally methodical, she treated all lack of method with severity, and scorned excuses. In imagination Beth could hear her cool voice: "Oh, of course, if you cared so little for your work as to leave your book lying about!"

The Fourth filed in unusually early that morning. They did not think that the result of the competition would actually be announced, but they expected one or two remarks from Miss MacCarthy. The careless observers, the unskilful with the pencil, the fainters by the way would get some hints and hits; the true labourers in the cause, the faithful few, would, if their luck was in, receive a few sparing words of praise, and would glow all day. The Fourth was quite

unprepared for Miss MacCarthy's enthusiastic opening words.

"I have received one book which has given me real pleasure."

Beth listened enviously. If only her book had gone in!

"The work has been most thoroughly and artistically done. Every change has been carefully noticed, and the whole thing shows patient effort and a love of the elm itself."

Elm! It must be Winnie Chester's work. She was the only other girl doing the elm.

"No other book has approached this in care and finish. I have therefore asked Miss Courtney's permission to announce the result at once, although the prize will be given with the other prizes on Speech-day. The winner is Beth, and I am sure you will want to give her a clap."

The form could not clap. It could only stare as Beth rose unsteadily to her feet.

"But, Miss MacCarthy, I've lost my book,"

she said. "I didn't like to tell you about it before, but I've hunted and hunted for it. It was in my room on Monday night, and then it was gone."

"Didn't Doreen tell you?" asked Miss MacCarthy. A look of comprehension crossed her face.

"My dear, I am sorry," she said. "Of course Doreen had to go to the sickroom that night, and therefore you did not receive my message. It was I who took the book from your study. A friend of mine wished to see one of the books, and I knew you had been working with interest, so I went to find you and your book. You were out, so I took the book and asked Doreen, who was passing, to tell you."

A storm of clapping broke out. Flip seized Beth's hand ecstatically. Jennifer was clapping as if she would never stop.

"Look at Thomas!" whispered Flip.

Beth looked across at the girl against whom she had been nursing a bitter grievance and to whom she had hardly been decently civil for two days. Not a trace of resentment

appeared in her face. She had mounted the back of her desk and was pounding it with her ruler in the purest delight.

The storm subsided as the mistress raised her hand. The lesson commenced, but Beth's thoughts were with Thomas. Would the lesson never end? Miss MacCarthy had hardly time to say "Good morning, all," and get clear of the room before Beth had flown to Thomas's side.

"Oh, Thomas, I'm sorry, so sorry I was nasty! I feel a worm! Can you forgive me?"

Thomas was radiant.

"Don't, Beth!" she said. "It was nothing really, and if I'd been in your place I'd have been a hundred times madder. I'd have knocked my head off."

"Well, it would be as well in your pocket as on your head most days, young Tom," said Flip, who had come up. "Still, we were pigs to you, and you're a brick to take it in so sporting a spirit. Who says a bathe and an ice each? I don't win a Botany prize every day, and if I hadn't kept my eyes glued on my beastly ash all this budding

year this honour wouldn't have come to us. Come on ! "

In delighted content the four of No. 8, now for the first time since their coming together thoroughly in sympathy, made for the cove.

CHAPTER VII

THE MUSHROOMERS

THREE major events loomed on the horizon of the pupils of "Dunces" towards the end of the summer term: the tennis tournament, the exams, and the competitions. The competitions were to be organised rather on the plan of a Welsh Festival. There were various events open to aspiring candidates, for the modest entrance fee of threepence. There were classes for vocal and instrumental music; dancing; English and French recitations, etc. But the section which especially interested our group in No. 8 was the tableaux, for each tableau was to be taken from one or other of Shakespeare's plays. Endless were the plans and discussions as to which scene No. 8 should attempt. Should they look for something requiring only their own four, or should they

join forces with No. 10, with whom they were on terms of great cordiality? Should they try something the school wouldn't recognise, or should they aim at something the very Second Form would jump at? And—most important of all—where was the cash for dresses to come from?

"Sateen is cheap and makes ripping dresses," said Jennifer.

"Cheap! Yes," replied Flip, "but if you haven't any money a thing might just as well be dear as cheap. I haven't a cent till next week, and then I owe ninepence to Julia Calthorpe."

"And I owe sixpence to Doreen," sighed Beth. "By the way, Flip Stod, you owe me a ha'penny."

"I don't."

"Yes, you do, over that tin of Devon Dumps."

"Well, you ate the Dumps; you know you did!"

"*I* ate the Dumps! I like that! Why, you hardly gave me a squint of the cover of the tin. You ate the lot that day you were in here doing your returned

algebra, because you said, when we came in and you went to the tin, 'Algebra plus toffee equals nought'—and it did equal nought, too, because the toffee was nought and Miss Dornington gave you nought because she said your book was sticky and disgustful."

"Stop her! stop her, somebody," wailed Flip. "I'll give anybody twopence to stop her as soon as I have twopence!"

"Shut up, you two," said Jennifer. "We shall never settle anything! Thomas, have you any money?"

"I've got threepence ha'penny. I shan't have any more for ages, because they are going to make me pay for that jug." Thomas had broken a jug a day or two before, and the price of it was being stopped out of her slender resources.

"If I had elbows like you, Tom, I'd go everywhere on all fours! How much have you got yourself, Jen?" said Flip.

"Sixpence farthing and no debts," answered Jennifer promptly.

"Beastly capitalist!" growled Flip. "I say, Jen, lend me twopence till——"

"I'm not going to lend a cent. I'm going to save it for the dresses."

"But what's the *use* of sixpence farthing?" said Flip. "It wouldn't make a string of copper coins to go round the waists of us. Consider Thomas alone! And you know Miss Courtney wouldn't like it. Besides, they wore a lot in Shakespeare's day."

"If only I had some rolls of coloured paper and some yards of sateen I could make most glorious dresses," sighed Jennifer. "Money! Money! How on earth are we to make some?"

"I tell you what! Mushrooms sell jolly well," said Beth. "I saw some at Ecclesmouth marked ninepence a pound when Miss Panton took me in to have my tooth out, and there were crowds of mushrooms on Thursday in Helford Close. We saw them when we went for that botany walk with the Mac."

"Yes, but the Matron wouldn't buy them off us. What's the use of that, Beth?"

"If only we could sell them in Ecclesmouth!"

"Oh, Beth!" said Flip, catching fire at once. "Why not? How glorious! We could pick them in the early morning and sell them in Ecclesmouth before breakfast. It would be so easy for us to disguise ourselves. We could all go out and pick, and then you and I could do the selling."

"But what could you wear?" asked Jennifer. "Tunics would give the show away at once."

"I know," said Flip. "I'll write and tell Aunt Clarissa I have to dress up as a boy, and please will she send me some of Tim's clothes that aren't school ones. How gorgeous it will be! You can wear your old hockey skirt, Beth, and your last year's coat and no hat. Bedraggle it all a bit, and it will look all right. What sport! When shall we do it?"

So eager were they that they could hardly wait for the coming of the parcel from Aunt Clarissa, and all the interim was spent in joyous anticipations. They practised the Devon dialect. Again and again Thomas and Jennifer were doomed to be house-holders urged to buy by eager sellers of

mushrooms. At length the parcel arrived, and the following Friday morning was fixed for the venture.

The four had little sleep that Thursday night. They were too anxious to be awake betimes. At five o'clock they were stealthily dressing. Their plan was to get down by the fire-escape in Doreen Etheridge's room, Doreen being still in the infirmary. Noiselessly they stole along the quiet corridors, with a sense of uneasiness at being thus alone in a house of sleep. They flitted down the spiral staircase and reached the lawn in safety. The early morning was coldly grey; the grass heavy with dew. The girls talked in subdued voices as though they were in some strange and high temple; but when they were out of the school grounds, and they had grown accustomed to the wonderful adventure, their spirits rose. They trod long paths in the dewy grass; they sniffed the freshness of the day like young colts; only the birds and they seemed to be awake. A few red heifers and puzzled, frowning calves looked at them wonderingly.

"How wet are you?" asked Flip pres-

ently. "I'm so wet that I might be paddling. These long grasses are like young watering-cans."

The tall, flowering spikes liberally besprinkled the legs of the mushroomers, who were not sorry to leave the rich meadowlands for Helford Close, a large barren tract which had not been broken by the plough for many years. Here the turf was shorter.

"Now scatter and keep your eyes open!"

For a few minutes they wandered in silence.

"Oh, look, look! Is this a mushroom, Beth?" exclaimed Thomas.

Beth came running up to inspect. "No go!" she said. "It's a puff-ball."

She knocked it over with her foot, revealing to Thomas the unsavoury workings. "A mushroom is a lovely pale pink underneath when it's young, and darker brown when it's old."

A call now came from Jennifer on the left.

"Hurrah! I've got a perfect peach of

a 'room. And here's another! Oh!—and another! Hundreds of them—yea, six at least! No coming over here! Bags I these!"

"Second blood to me!" Flip was on the extreme right. "Here's the grandfather of the lot. You've never *seen* such an enormous chap! Seem's cheek to disturb him."

Thomas envied them. Would it never be her turn? Suddenly right at her feet she spied a gleaming white button. Was it a puff-ball? She plucked it breathlessly. It was a beautiful pale pink underneath.

"Flip! Flip! I've got one," she called joyously. "A baby one, just born! And here's another! It's the most glorious fun."

Seldom had the four been happier than thus pressing their fingers against the dewy earth to get the mushrooms. Here and there in the field they ran. The sun came out and shone upon them, but they hardly noticed, they were so eager at their work. Only when they rested and took breaths of the delicious air were they pricked by the beauty of that

June morning into wonder and a kind of reverence. They fell quiet.

"Great, isn't it?" said Beth at last, as they stood with the basket at their feet.

"Glorious," answered Flip; "and we are generally in bed missing it all. What flats we are!"

"We shall be worse flats if we don't get on with our job." Jennifer was coming back to earth. "We've got our baskets full. Now what's the next move? Tom and I get back to 'Dunces,' and put your clothes in a bundle in the Little, and you two go on to Ecclesmouth to make our fortunes—is that it?"

"Thus it is, my lord," said Flip.

So the four parted, Thomas and Jennifer making for the school, while Beth and Flip took the trail to Ecclesmouth, which they reached just before seven o'clock. All was silent and deserted in the little fishing port except for the milk-carts which rattled like pence in an empty box. The two girls held a council of war.

"We must go to the biggest houses. The

small ones won't be able to rise to mushrooms at our price."

"But what price will they be? We haven't scales or anything. I never thought of that—did you?" Beth spoke earnestly.

"We'll sell them on the egg principle," said Flip. "So much a dozen."

"That's an idea—but how much?"

"Well, what about sixpence? Sounds well, don't you think? One or two over if they're very small. Sixpence a dozen has a nice, neat, ordinary sound to my ear."

"Right-o! Forge ahead. That's a biggish house. Oh, Flip, I shan't like to ask!"

"Do you dare look your mushrooms in the face and confess weakness, Beth Freeman? We're bringing food to the British public. We're public benefactors. Be a man!"

"It's all very well for you. *You've* got trousers, but I'm just my ordinary self."

"You don't look it, my dear, if that's any comfort to you. Come on! We must go to the back door."

They stole up the back path of a neat villa residence and rang the bell. There was no response.

"Ring again!" said Beth.

Flip hung on to the electric bell and roused vigorous echoes. Still there was no answer.

"This time or never." Flip made a more shrilling clamour.

A window in the upper storey was suddenly thrust upward, and a bald shining head wagged out of it. Flip and Beth stared up in fascination as an irate voice began:

"You precious young rascals, breaking my bell, and waking the town! Be off with you!"

"Mushrūmes! Fresh mushrūmes!" sang out Flip undaunted, and in her best Devonshire accent.

"I'll mushroom you if I get down there, my lad. Be off, I say! Out of the gate now —sharp!"

Beth was hastily withdrawing, but Flip could not resist the target presented by that gleaming head. Its owner had no sooner

let his attention wander from the intruders to the state of the weather than she seized a compact, solid little button, and gave it a skilful flip with her finger. It scored a bull's eye on the polished crown and rebounded like a young hailstone.

"You varmint!" yelled the man; "I'll——" "I'll——"

The pair did not stay to learn his intentions. Sputtering with laughter, they decamped, and the respectable citizen's opinion of the rising generation was delivered in his best style to the morning air.

Still laughing but nevertheless a little cooled by their first rebuff, the two girls made for another house. Here a maid was washing the step. They presented their produce.

"We don't eat no mushrooms in this house. Master he was nigh poisoned with the heathenish things, and what he said to the missis 'tisn't for the like of me to repeat. But I tell 'ee what! You go down to Miss Slocomb's, her that do take lodgers. I've heard tell that they eat things a Christian wouldn't look at, and turn up their noses

to proper vittals. They'm queer toads—lodgers! You try they, beginning with Miss Slocomb's."

The maid gave the two adventurers full directions for the Slocomb residence, and her advice proved to be excellent. Certainly lodgers were addicted to improper victuals, for the fresh mushrooms sold like ice-cream wafers at a Sunday-school treat. Soon only half a basketful remained, and money was jingling in the delighted pockets of the pair. They were just approaching a house, which they decided must be their last, when they saw a man approaching with a bathing towel round his neck. He had been taking a morning dip, and was making for a bicycle standing close at hand.

"Mushrūmes! fresh mushrūms!" sang out Flip merrily, and then her voice broke, for the young man stopped, glared at Flip and at her basket, and suddenly half lifted his hand to his head in salutation before he strode on.

"Billings!" ejaculated Flip.

"How awful! He'll tell Miss Courtney."

"No," said Flip calmly. "He likes me, Billings does. He won't split. It's a good thing we aren't his boys though. We should catch it hot. Come on now, it's time we were getting back. We'll try this last house and go."

The last house rose beyond their most fanciful imaginings. By the time they retraced their steps down its flourishing kitchen garden they had not only got rid of their remaining mushrooms, but were the possessors of a bun apiece.

"Ought we to have taken them?" queried Beth.

"Ra-*ther*," said Flip, running her teeth lusciously into the currants. "Did you ever eat a better bun in your life? If we'd only looked a bit thin she might have given us two more, and that would have been one each for the others. Too early to buy anything, I suppose. I say! if only Billings had seen us with our buns!"

They went off into peals of laughter at the thought, then pulled themselves together and made for the school, maintaining a steady trot until they found themselves in

the Little. Here they changed their clothes, took the racquets their friends had taken care to leave for them, and strolled with an elaborately casual air towards the school. They well knew that all who saw them would conclude they had got up early for tennis practice on the hard courts, and that afterwards they had searched for botany specimens for Miss MacCarthy. Innocent-looking clovers covered the guilty garments in the bottom of the baskets.

Never was adventure more successful. Not a hitch in the arrangements. The two ate a particularly hearty breakfast, and then rushed to No. 8 for a moment of rejoicing with their allies and to exhibit the gains. They had made seven and sixpence.

"We'll dress ourselves like gods," said Jennifer. "It will be fine."

"But we'll have just one ice each out of the money, won't we, Jen?"

"No, we won't!" said Jennifer, with decision. "Hand it over, Flip. We shan't have a penny for dresses if you have the handling of it. Come on now! Stump up!"

Reluctantly Flip passed over the precious silver.

"The first money I ever earned," she wailed, "and my shrew of a wife bags it. But we had the buns, Beth!"

CHAPTER VIII

BACKING A WINNER

ROLLS of coloured paper and some yards of gay sateen soon found places of honour within the precincts of No. 8. But even Jennifer's ardour for "dressing up" was in abeyance as the school tennis tournament began to narrow towards the final games. So many entries marked the event every year that the preliminary games went on for several weeks. Beth had fallen out, well satisfied with her own performance at her fourth encounter. Thomas had learnt during the term to hold her racquet less like a flower, and to discern "rough" from "smooth." She could even count when prompted, but otherwise it could not be said she made much progress in the game. She had not, of course, entered for the tournament. Neither had Jennifer. She

preferred to feel cool and elegant, and although she played a passable game—for Jennifer was competent at most things—she had none of Flip's thrilling delight at the feel of the lined wood in her hands, at the ping of the ball on the racquet, and the glorious mastery of the smash. Jennifer liked to be a spectator where really hard play was concerned. She provided the decorative element and the lemons. One of her concoctions, iced with infinite pains, had made the happy drinkers the envy of the school, but had nearly proved fatal to Flip in her eighth contest by causing a pain at a vital moment.

Hereafter Flip had eschewed consoling drinks, and to the delight of her friends had won her way on until now she was the only surviving member of the Fourth. In future she would meet veteran players of the Fifth and Sixth Forms. Not only the ambitions of No. 8, but those of the entire Lower and Middle School, were centred on Flip. Never before had one of their number risen up to challenge the supremacy of the Upper School. Playing gamely, they had nevertheless always

fallen out of the great tournament before the final games were reached. Now only six players remained—the admired Arline Chapman, head of the school and captain of games; Carol Finchly, her right-hand man, brawny of arm and a fine sportswoman; Elfrida Lake, whose light form and dainty grace gave no hint of the lightning power of her service; and Ethel and Edith Cardinal, two sisters in the Fifth, who played a good game through sheer good coaching, their parents being tennis enthusiasts.

Flip's chances were eagerly canvassed throughout the school, and in No. 8, it may readily be believed, there was no other topic of conversation.

"If you're drawn with Edith Cardinal, you'll win," pronounced Beth decisively; "if with Ethel, you have some chance if you play up her left, because she is really a bit of a mug on the left. If with any of the others, only the intervention of the gods could give you a win. Elfrida's service!—my hat!"

"Suppose you're drawn with Arline straight away?" said Thomas.

"All up!" said Flip; "but isn't it jolly to have it on the cards that I play with Arline at all? I hope I give her a run for her money. Wouldn't it be awful if she just walked over me and I gave her no sport?"

Flip shivered at the bare thought. Although she would not for worlds have admitted it in No. 8, Arline was her hero. A nod of her head and a careless word of praise made Flip joyful for days, and hadn't she said yesterday, "Good for you, kid!" after Flip's victory?

It was difficult to get near the notice-board when the result of the "draw" was posted, but Jennifer, always lithe, somehow managed to wriggle her way to the front.

"Arline with Elfrida! Golly! that will be a tussle!"

"You are with Ethel Cardinal, Flip," came Jennifer's cool voice. "I shall have to ginger you up with something."

"Give her another iced lemon, Jen," said Muriel Etheridge, who was standing by, and who had been Flip's opponent on the day of the famous pain. "That drink nearly

helped me to victory. Poor old Flip, she did look queer!"

There was a general laugh, under cover of which our friends retreated to No. 8 to talk over once more the chances of victory.

"She'd have had a walk-over if she'd been drawn with Edith," sighed Beth.

"What time is it fixed for?" asked Thomas.

"Half-past three," said Beth. "The thing is, we must all unite in telling her to play up Ethel Cardinal's left. She's no shakes at all on the left, and Flip's really jolly good. Muriel told Grace, who told me, that Miss Avery said Flip's left was all right, and that's something for the Avery. It was the day Flip beat Muriel, and the Ave did speak to her—I saw her."

"Play up her left" was accordingly dinned into Flip's ears from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same; and seemingly she prospered by advice, for all the Middle School agreed that their champion had never played better than against Ethel Cardinal. It was "tennis," and tennis after

their own hearts, for it left their man master of the field. At the same time Arline had defeated Elfrida after a fierce battle, and Edith Cardinal had been utterly outclassed by Carol Finchly.

Never had excitement in the Middle School run so high. A hero of their own to be near the finals! If only she could be *in* the final! Arline, Carol, Flip; Flip, Arline, Carol; Carol, Flip, Arline—the names were on everybody's tongue. Who would draw a blank and walk over to the final? If only Flip could draw a blank! No. 8 prayed for it earnestly, but it was not to be. Flip was drawn with Carol Finchly, and with the advice of her friends ringing in her ears and her back warmed by a hundred pats, she went forth to battle.

This was very different from her affair with Ethel Cardinal. Carol Finchly was masterly with the racquet. Her service was immeasurably stronger than Flip's. Only in running did the younger girl have some advantage, and to such splendid use did she put her powers that it was apparent from the first that Carol

would have to exert all her strength to win.

The first set fell to Carol with a score of six three. Perhaps her success made her too confident, for the next three games were won by Flip. Then Carol crept up. Hard battling and the score was at four all. Carol grew excited and a little nervous. She could not lose to a Fourth Form girl. Flip, cheered by her unexpected success, played on grimly—four five ; four six. The set was hers and her backers grew hoarse with cheering.

A silence fell on the courts as the two girls took their places for the third and winning set. Now or never. It was Flip's service, but excitement made her unsteady. Two double faults !

" Love thirty ! " sang out the scorer.

" Steady, Flip ! " said Thomas under her breath. " Oh, steady ! "

Flip delivered the first ball of her third service. Cheers. It swept over the net and touched for an instant the extreme left corner of the inner court. Carol tried it gamely, but was outdone.

"Fifteen thirty," said the scorer.

Again Flip stood to serve.

"Net."

"Another."

"Fault!"

"Another."

In! But a fairly easy shot. Carol sent the ball spinning back and a long rally ensued.

"Thirty all."

"If only she wouldn't risk double faults!" said Beth to Jennifer. "In a rally she often wins. There she goes again! If only she'd try an easy second shot instead of smashing in two hot ones."

"Thirty forty," said the scorer.

"Double fault. Game to striker."

Jennifer and Beth groaned. Carol's service! No double faults this time. Rally succeeded rally, but Carol's luck was in.

"Game to server," announced the scorer in her level tones.

"She's got two to catch up now," said Thomas. "She'll never do it, Beth. It's so awful to think you've got two to catch up before you are even where you were to start

with. Oh! oh! if only she'll be careful of double faults."

But Flip seemed to be beyond care, and played the next gane with reckless energy.

"Love three," came from the Games' mistress in her high chair; and then not so very long after, "Four love," as yet another game fell to Carol.

"What on earth's the matter with her?" said Beth. "She's just chucking games away. I've never seen her play so badly."

The spirits of the Middle School were visibly falling. Carol was going to have a walk-over in this third set. They looked on silently now as Flip took her place for service. If she lost this, they felt they were done.

Flip seemed to feel the tension and served a double fault. The spirits of the Fourth sank lower. Beth was afraid to look at the court.

Then "Played! played indeed!" came from Jennifer. With a brilliant volley near the net Flip had won the second point. The

game went on. Miraculously Flip seemed to have recovered her grip.

"One, four," called the scorer.

"Three to make up yet before we can breathe," said Thomas. "Oh, Beth, isn't it awful?"

Flip had realised that she was playing for the honour of the Fourth. The odds against her steadied her nerves and brought out the fighting spirit of her ancestors. Where many a girl would have given it up as hopeless, Flip set her teeth. The whole school watched with approval and delight her play in the sixth game. Deuce no less than six times, and then game to Flip.

"Two four! Two four!" muttered Beth when it was over. "Now!"

Breathlessly she watched the next game. Flip played finely; Carol too was on her mettle. The struggle seemed endless, but Flip won.

"Three four!" said Beth, and then crooned to herself in ecstatic tones—"Four *All!* Four *ALL*."

"Oh, did you ever know anything like it?"

cried Jennifer. "Four All and Flip's service. Played! oh, well played!"

The ball sped from the racquet like a cannon-ball. Carol returned it, and now it was speeding to what seemed an inaccessible corner of Flip's court. Could she possibly reach it? Yes. A lovely backhand drive.

"Fifteen love."

The play went on. The spectators, almost silent now, watched too eagerly for comment. Only a hand-clap marked the finer points.

When a score of five four in Flip's favour had been reached, the Fifth and Sixth Forms, hitherto so confident in their champion, began to feel unpleasant premonitions. Still, it was Carol's service, and her skill did not fail her. With smashing effect the balls were hurled into Flip's court, but it seemed now that Flip could do no wrong. She returned balls which her friends would have thought utterly impossible for her an hour before.

She surprised herself. Sometimes she seemed to shut her eyes at a low, sweeping

service, and yet by some instinctive action with the racquet achieved a return. Her running was effortless; she was always on the spot, though Carol tried left of the court and right; now dropping a ball right under the net, now sending it spinning to the base line. The score was deuce and the games four five, Flip leading and Carol serving.

"Vantage in."

"Deuce."

"Vantage out."

Carol prepared to serve. She simply must get past Flip this time and bring the score back to deuce. The ball shot like lightning from her racquet.

"She'll never take that," thought Beth.

Even as she thought it, Flip's racquet was down; the ball rose not an inch above the net, passed obliquely across Carol's court and out by the left, just touching the court within the line. It was a masterly winning shot.

"Game and set," said the scorer in her phlegmatic tones, and the two girls advanced to shake hands.

"You played a topping game," said Carol generously.

Flip wished she could think of something to say. It seemed such awful cheek to condole with a Fifth Former. So she stood wishing herself further until, like a whirlwind, her friends in No. 8 swept down upon her, followed by a crowd of girls. In triumph they bore their champion from the field, to regale her with everything liable to make her unfit for the final match.

"It was my racquet did it, you know," Flip was saying. "It just seems to grow enchanted when the game gets hot. It's the queerest thing. It plays by itself."

"And I suppose your legs grow enchanted and run by themselves?" laughed Beth.

"Oh, my legs! My legs are always enchanted. Aren't they lovely things the way they fly about! I'd rather die than not be able to run fast. Yes, please—just a tail and whisker more." This in reply to an invitation to try another fine red prawn—Thomas's contribution to the feast.

The noise and laughter were at their height when Carol Finchly and Arline Chapman passed by.

"They'll turn the head of that Philippa child," said Carol, "and that will be a pity. She has in her the makings of a fine player. She was too good for me, you know; it wasn't just luck."

"No," replied Arline, "but I don't somehow think she's the kind of girl to be spoilt by a little adulation. It's good for her to know what it feels like before she gets up the school. She'll be head of the sports' side one day."

And Arline, who was going up to Newnham next term, sighed. She loved "Dunces," where her interests had been centred during the most impressionable years of her life. Would this girl, into whose hands power would certainly fall, uphold the traditions worthily? She continued to ponder the question long after she had bidden adieu to Carol Finchly, and went to bed with the subject uppermost in her mind.

And if she had only known it, Flip, in bed too, passing in excited review the events of

to-day and yesterday, paused on the brink of the strange wilderness of sleep to say over and over again the captain's own words of careless praise, "Well played! Good for you, kid!"

CHAPTER IX

A DOUBLE GAME

THE final match of the school tournament was at "Dunces" an important occasion. Even the Head, that remote deity, usually came to watch. House-mistresses and subject-mistresses turned up in force, and the school attended to a man.

The match was fixed for the Saturday afternoon succeeding the semi-finals. It was to be played on the centre hard court, and it is to be feared that the Fourth Form thought and talked of little else. Flip practised constantly in her spare time, and was up in the early morning trying left-hand returns against a hard high wall.

By dinner-time on the Saturday she began to feel that the hour for play would never arrive, and as soon as the meal was over she

seized on Beth and announced that a walk she must and would have.

"But you have to dress, you know," said Beth.

"It's likely I'm going to take two hours to dress, isn't it? Come on, Beth; I must walk or run away the time. The others will all be at me telling me what to do if we don't get away quick."

The two set out in the direction of Ecclesmouth, chatting of various doings and happenings, but avoiding the insistent topic of the match. They had walked thus for perhaps a quarter of an hour when their attention was attracted by frantic waving from the window of a solitary house on their left. The two girls stopped.

"Did you see that?" asked Flip.

"Seemed to be waving to us, didn't she? but she's gone now."

"There she is again—look! She is signalling to us. She's got a scarf or something. Let's run."

The figure at the window disappeared as the girls ran to the garden gate and flew up

the flower-bordered path to the door of the house. They were met by a woman, wide-eyed and anxious.

"My baby!" she said. "There's no one here to send, and I must have a doctor. I can't leave Baby to go myself. He has been taken suddenly ill and looks dreadful. Quick! I can't leave him long. Can you go to Dunscombe Bridges for Doctor Alfington? If only my husband were here he could go on his motor-bike, but he won't be back till evening. I'm all alone."

The woman began to cry.

"Where's the motor-bike?" asked Flip swiftly.

"In the shed by the side-path."

"I'll ride it. I'll get the doctor then in no time. It would take ages to *walk* to Bridges. Quick—help me out with it, Beth."

"Can you ride?" demanded the woman anxiously.

"Yes. Quick, Beth!"

The two girls flew to the shed and brought out the motor-bicycle. It was a magnificent

high-power "Sunbeam." Flip examined the controls.

"It's all right," she said. "This is the clutch—look. These must be the air and petrol levers. It's much like 'Rex.' I'll just see if there's enough juice in the tank, then you'd better push me off; it'll be quicker than the kick-starter as she's cold. Or stop! there's a slope just outside the house. I'll slide down that and slip into gear at the bottom. Help me out of the garden. So long!"

"But, Flip, the match!" said Beth as Flip prepared to mount.

"I shall be back," was the answer; "if not—well!"

She was off.

The "Sunbeam" moved smoothly down the hill, gathering momentum. Flip lifted the clutch, slipped into gear, let out the clutch—and—joy!—the engine was on. Now for some riding. Four miles to cover, and to cover quickly. She slipped into top gear, and the bicycle flew between the hedges. Cross-roads and a farm-cart! A lightning veer to the right, and with a salute to the

astonished driver of turnips she slid past. Sheep! Back to low gear and a game of dodging the frightened animals, then again into high. The telegraph poles darted to meet her and the wind sang in her ears. Her eyes smarted with dust, but on she went, up one steep Devon hill like a bird and down to the valley beyond. Flip was light and the "Sunbeam" was powerful.

The outskirts of Dunscombe Bridges—a pause to inquire for the doctor's house—the door—the ringing of the bell—the maid's answer:

"Doctor! He've gone to Luddersly to set a broken leg, and he've gone on his bike because he've scat up his car. Reckon you'll catch 'un there before he do go on to Puddlecombe if you do ride your bike. 'Tain't your own, surelie?"

"No," said Flip, "no! Tell me the way, quick. And what time is it?"

"Just after half-past two, I reckon; and as for the way, you can't miss 'un. Down the hill to Bulley's, the 'Cow and Calf'; up to your right and round by Crown Week

farm. Then right on into it, only don't 'ee turn off where it do say Newton Abbott. Keep straight on. There's Carter's whistle; 'tis quarter to three. That's the post whistle."

Flip's heart contracted. The match! She was already four miles from school and Luddersly was at least two miles farther on — and if the doctor should not be there! No use to worry! The idea of entrusting the message to another was instantly dismissed. It was her job. She could ride, and ride fast. She used the kick-starter this time, for the "Sunbeam" was warm now, and in two kicks was again ready to ride. She must get to Luddersly quickly or Puddlecombe would be her goal, and Puddlecombe was a good four miles farther. The district was a scattered one and the doctor's round was wide.

The "Sunbeam" bore her well, however; past the "Cow and Calf," as the maid had said; by Crown Week farm and the Newton turning; and there lay scattered the half-dozen cottages which made the village of

Luddersly. A man's bicycle stood outside a garden gate. Surely the doctor himself strode down the garden path?

He paused at the sight of the dishevelled figure astride the stationary motor-bike.

Flip waved her hand, but as the doctor drew nearer doubt clouded her eyes.

"You aren't right, after all!" she said.

"No?" he queried. "What am I to do about it?"

"You see I hoped you were Doctor Alfington."

"So I am. Nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"Our doctor is nice and old," said Flip. "I thought——"

"We all become nice and old," laughed the doctor. "And I'm not so terribly young. What do you want?"

Flip poured out her tale and instantly the doctor was on the alert.

"I ought to get there quickly," he said. "And I must stop at my house for instruments. Is it your motor-bike?

You are too young for it, surely. I thought all motor cyclists had to be nice and old."

Flip smiled at this counter-thrust.

"It belongs to the husband of the baby's mother," she said gravely.

"Do you think I could borrow the bike of the husband of the baby's mother, as they used to say in the French books?"

Flip's heart contracted again. She was now nearly seven miles from the school and it must be nearly three o'clock. The match was at three-thirty.

"Will you lend me yours?" she asked swiftly. "I'll leave it by Dunscombe School lodge."

"So you are at Dunscombe?" said the doctor. "My bicycle has a bar, you know."

Flip looked at him witheringly.

"May I have it?"

The doctor hesitated, but in a moment Flip had seized the bike, mounted in a manner which long acquaintance with Tim's old "Rudge" had made professional, and

was spinning along the road. A honk-honk from the "Sunbeam" told her the doctor was on her tracks. The two saluted as the doctor disappeared in a flash, leaving Flip with just over half an hour to pedal nearly seven miles of up-and-down country.

There was nothing for it but to press forward with all her might, and with all her might she rode. There was no engine now to tick in when she had coasted a hill and to carry her like a bird up the other side. Now there was her own strength and nothing else to aid her, and—after she had ridden a mile, she was bound to admit it—the doctor's bike. It was a willing bike, ready to give of its best without grudging; a free and limber bike, without any of the bad symptoms either of extreme youth or stiff old age; moreover, it was a bike of high birth and grit. Flip used its three-speed gear with a sense of pleasure, and even whispered to herself that when it came to free-wheeling a hill a motor-bike wasn't in it with a "pusher." But the uphill work took time

and strength, and it was nearing three-thirty when Flip, her face streaming with perspiration, her hair in short tight curls about her head, a zigzag hole in one stocking, and a sad outline of the map of Ireland in oil on her tunic, turned in at Dunscombe Lodge. What would Arline think if her opponent were late? Would Beth have thought of bringing out her racquet?

That a friend doubles joys and halves troubles Flip would gratefully have admitted as she spied the steady figure of Beth, a racquet in one hand and a small case in the other, standing near a clump of bushes. There was no time for many words.

"I've got all your things," said Beth. "Buck up and change behind the bushes. You'll just do it."

Flip disappeared as she was bidden, and in the twinkling of an eye stepped out again in the regulation tennis dress of Dunscombe —short socks to keep the shoes from galling the feet, a loose short frock of white flannel with rolled collar and short sleeves, the

Dunscombe tie and pin—Beth had forgotten nothing. The two girls raced for the courts.

The school had assembled. Girls and mistresses were everywhere, and the Head was already in her chair of state. The Games mistress, in her umpire's seat, was looking at her watch. Arline, cool and collected, was on the court.

"Silly girl to run it so fine!" the Games mistress was fuming. "Has no one seen her?"

"Here she is, Miss Avery, here she is!" came from several voices—and here indeed she was.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Avery," she panted, "but I was detained. I'm most awfully sorry, Arline."

Arline was not pleased. She did not approve of people running in for tennis finals hot and breathless a moment before the time of commencement. Surely Flip was not the sort of girl to come nearly late for effect.

"I hope you are not imitating Suzanne," she said coldly.

"Very foolish of you, Philippa," said the Games mistress.

Flip pushed the damp curls from her forehead and said no more. It was a hard world.

"Rough or smooth?" asked the Games mistress.

"Smooth," said Arline, and smooth it was. Arline elected to take service, and Flip, her legs a little wobbly after her late efforts, prepared to face the music.

Questioned afterwards, she always maintained that her seven-mile ride in the burning sun had made no difference to her, and that she played her best; but her friends whispered that on this occasion her best did not equal her best against Carol Finchly. No doubt Arline's play was more masterly than Carol's. With a less spectacular service, she nevertheless managed to send down very difficult balls, and her volleying was remarkable for a girl of eighteen. Flip had never expected to win, but her heart had been set on giving Arline "something for her money." In this the school generally agreed she

succeeded, although she did not, as she had so ardently desired, run the match into three sets. The first two sets were won by Arline with a score of six three, six three. Any disappointment the younger girl might have felt was lost in Arline's generous words and in the warmth of her handshake after the match.

"You'll play a better game than I by the time you are head of sports," she said. "Good luck to you. You made me work hard."

The Games mistress, too, had recovered her temper. She praised one or two of Flip's shots, and when after this the two girls went together, according to custom, to receive the congratulations of the Headmistress herself, Thomas felt that her friend was exalted indeed.

"Heavens! Fancy shaking hands with Miss Courtney!" she whispered to Beth. "Hope her hands are clean."

"Whose?" chuckled Beth. "Flip's aren't, I can tell you. Never seen such paws—and her *nails*!"

It was indeed a particularly grubby and

hot hand which Flip placed in the delicate palm of the Head, but Miss Courtney appeared unobservant. She had much enjoyed the game, she said, and congratulated Flip on being in the Final while still a IVA girl.

Flip was basking pleasantly in the comfortable glow of approval when she was staggered to see a man approaching over the lawn. Conducted by Miss Clemence, he was making straight for the Headmistress. Flip turned to escape, but it was impossible. Doctor Alfington had already caught sight of her.

"I was there just in time," he said. "The baby is safe, thanks to you. Ten minutes later, and not the oldest and nicest doctor in the world could have been of any use. You have saved a life to-day—and played your game, too, apparently," he added, noticing the racquet.

He turned to the Headmistress, but not before Flip had time to hiss in his ear: "Don't say it was a motor-bike; it was your wife's jigger, mind!"

Whether her warning had been heard and

understood or not she could not tell. The doctor made no sign, but talked earnestly to Miss Courtney. Arline, who had overheard what had been said, whispered, "Was *that* why you were nearly late?"

"Yes. I wouldn't have had it happen for anything, Arline."

"I'm so glad," said Arline. "I hated to think that you——"

"Of course," Flip's voice sounded. "I say, can't we flit?"

"Not until she dismisses us. The doctor seems to be going now."

The doctor was about to depart, but before he took his leave he turned slightly in Flip's direction and said clearly:

"So you see my sister's old bicycle came in useful. I must now ask Miss Philippa to return it."

"Didn't you see it?" asked Flip. "I left it where I said."

"I inquired of the lodge-keeper, but she had heard nothing of it."

"Oh no, of course I didn't tell her. I left it behind the clump of laurels. I thought you'd look there."

"Very silly of me," said the doctor meekly. "Still, laurel bushes don't usually sprout bicycles, and so——"

"You had better go with Doctor Alfington, Philippa, and show him where you left the machine." The Head spoke graciously. "I am glad you have been of service this afternoon. Perhaps you will go too, Arline."

The three set out.

"Doesn't she like motor-bicycles?" queried the doctor.

"Hates 'em," said Flip briefly. "Noisy, bad for the carriage and the abdominal muscles, cause hunched shoulders and a strained expression of the face, promote aggressiveness and bad manners, and a lady wouldn't be seen dead on one. That last bit's mine, but the rest is Miss Courtney, isn't it, Arline?"

Arline looked uncomprehending.

"Our young friend is giving your Head's opinion of motor-cycling," explained the doctor.

"I fetched him on one, Arline—this doctor—on a motor-bike, I mean. It was a 'Sun-

beam,' a beauty. What time did *you* make ? " she went on.

" I covered the distance in about ten minutes," said Doctor Alfington.

" Well over thirty an hour. Not so bad ! " Flip looked approving. " I say, have you a sister ? It was sporting of you not to let on that it was a man's bike."

" I couldn't very well fall in with your suggestion of a wife, or Miss Courtney might have wondered how I'd married so quickly. I'm old enough, of course, but not perhaps sufficiently nice for any one to wish to marry me. But I've a *bona fide* sister."

" And here's the bike that isn't hers," said Flip. By this time they had reached the clump of laurels. " Next time you can't find a thing, take my Aunt Clarissa's advice and look around you."

" Flip ! " cried Arline protestingly. But Flip was not to be restrained.

" Well he *ought,* Arline ! Any donkey would have thought of looking behind the bushes. Very place for a bike ! "

"Quite, quite!" said the doctor. "I stand rebuked. By the way, I had almost forgotten to give you this. Mrs. Jenkinson hopes you will wear it sometimes in remembrance of your ride." He held out a beautiful little gold and pearl tie-pin, exquisitely wrought. Flip looked at it admiringly.

"It's lovely!" she said. "But ought I to take it? I haven't done anything. Just enjoyed myself on the old jigger."

Doctor Alfington glanced at her keenly.

"I should take it. Mrs. Jenkinson would be hurt otherwise, and it may help to remind you, if you ever need reminding, that there are other things in the world beside sport. Good-bye, Miss Arline. And I won't forget to look for bicycle fruits when next I see a laurel, Miss Philippa — and don't forget what I said."

"What did he mean by that?" said Flip as the doctor cycled away. "Who'd have thought he'd turn so solemn? What did he mean, Arline?"

"What he said," answered Arline quietly. "You know perfectly well what he meant, Flip."

"I don't," said Flip stoutly.

But she did.

CHAPTER X

THE FOUR DEVISE A STICKY PLASTER

IT all came about because of what Beth called the vindictive nature of the head gardener, who lived in the school lodge. Beth had a long-standing feud with this gentleman, and her friends, in honour bound, also eyed him askance, a fact which perhaps explains Flip's reluctance to commit the doctor's bike to the shadow of the lodge.

Iffley was certainly a trying man. For one thing, he was of unprepossessing appearance and objectionable habit — he spat. His stubbly beard would, according to Jennifer, serve as a saucepan cleaner; he had a wart on his nose, and a hairy formidable wart it was. Then he distrusted girls and accused them of picking flowers and using his hose unlawfully. But

the real origin of the feud was connected with the garden tools and with the change of plots.

From time immemorial girls at " Dunces " had had gardens of their own at pleasure. Naturally Beth, as a keen botanist, had a garden, and worked in it with diligence. She was methodical, and her temper flared up when Iffley accused her of leaving his rake about. For one thing, she never had his rake ; and for another, if she had had it, had he ever known her leave tools about ? Of course he left it about himself. What about that new pair of clippers he left in the open for a week ? One of the girls had found it, rusty and spoilt. That was the way Iffley used tools. " Cruelty to agricultural implements," Beth called it.

The war of the rake was carried on with considerable acrimony and with reprisals on both sides. But it paled into insignificance before the great war of the plots. This broke out one morning when Miss MacCarthy announced that the girls' plots were to be removed from that part of the grounds known as the " Great " to a more remote and

obscure place behind the "Little." At first no particular reason was assigned, but it became known that Iffley was having the site of the old plots for a rose and sweet-pea garden. Then feeling ran high among the "plotters." They called a council, in which the feebleness of Miss Courtney in pandering to Iffley was hotly denounced; the school was going to the dogs. Plots that had been plots for years and years, to be plots no longer, just because the gardener wanted a rose and sweet-pea garden! Miss Courtney must be led to see the light. She must be made to see that plots were plots, and that in them the Upper Fourth possessed vested rights. After a long discussion it was decided to send her a round robin. Thomas would like to have seen it impressive in blood, but her suggestion was pooh-poohed as kiddish, and the more conventional black fluid was adopted. When completed, the document read as follows:

"We the undersigned in the circle beg to protest against the Annexation of our Rights by Iffley for his sweet-peas. In digging he

has cut up one member's violets which have been in the garden from time immemorial, having been bequeethed to present owner, and will die if removed. The undersigned do seek redress of these grievances and please may we have our old plots back?"

The Fourth was proud of this production, more especially the bit about redress of grievances, which Doreen had cribbed from a history book. Every member of the form signed her name "plotter" or "non-plotter," and a thrill was felt when, after prayers one morning, Miss Courtney announced that she would meet the Upper Fourth in its form room before first lesson.

Every girl was in her place when the Headmistress entered, but the meeting was not satisfactory. Miss Courtney explained that she could not comply with the request of the Fourth Form, and pointed out that however well small plots were kept—and she wished to congratulate IVA on painstaking effort—they were bound to have a patchy appearance, and were thus in a sense a dis-

figurement to the general appearance of the garden. She further went on to show that the new site for plots had been most carefully chosen; that it had a southern aspect and most excellent soil; and that it was on her suggestion, and not Iffley's, that the change was being made.

IVA sat at its desks looking straight ahead. It wasn't deceived by talk of southern aspects, not it! And of course it was Iffley's fault. Miss Courtney might talk her head off, but IVA was certain Iffley had coveted the plots for his beastly sweet-peas. Beth was sure he had especially desired her plot.

"He can have it, and sow his beastly wart in it for all I care, and bring forth a hundredfold. I hope Miss Courtney will pass by and find one sprouting on her own nose and that it will be a good hairy one. So there!"

"Hear, hear! said Flip, "and may it be two of them! A twin wart would look so distinguished."

Thomas was told off to write a ballad on Iffley's nose, and produced a version of an

English folk-song, which was much admired. It began :

> "Now down in Devon there was a school,
> The finest school that ever was seen
> And the green grass grew all round,"

and then proceeded to tell how by that school there was a lodge, and in that lodge there was a gardener, and on that gardener there was a face, and on that face there was a nose, and on that nose there was a wart, and on that wart there was a hair, etc. And always the green grass grew all round. Thus the girls attempted to assuage their vexation at having to transplant their cherished larkspurs and violas. Beth was sure her rose-bush would die, but would she leave it for Iffley? Not she. Just what the old beast would have liked. He'd always been jealous of that rose.

With such a just cause of grievance it is hardly to be wondered at that the four of No. 8 should seek to get even with Iffley. True, Beth alone was actually an aggrieved person, but what is the use of friends if they will not throw themselves heart and soul into your quarrels? Flip, Jennifer, and

Thomas understood this part of friendship well, and soon Flip, who never gardened for more than five minutes at a time, and Thomas, who hated to touch earth with her fingers, and Jennifer, who said flowers were all right if you hadn't to grow them, might have been dispossessed of ancient prized patrimonies of a hundred years' standing, such was the rancour they displayed.

Iffley's lodge was a pretty dwelling in a pretty garden, and the pride of it was its wall. Ripe peaches basked upon that wall in summer-time, and it completely surrounded the garden. A straight and narrow gate led into the secluded domain. Through it the girls caught glimpses of fabulous flowers and fruits, but they could not look over the garden wall, and only one or two of the boldest had ever attempted to scale it, for Iffley, or Iffley's wife, or Iffley's starchy daughter, or one of the Iffley younger fry seemed ubiquitous, and mistresses were known to deal severely with offences against Iffley.

Yet when our four saw a pile of moist,

unattended cement near Iffley's garden gate one fine evening they paused to have a look at it, and that pause was their undoing, for Flip at once said :

" That stuff sticks very hard, when it does stick, doesn't it ? I suppose he's got it there to fill up any crevices in his wall where we might get a foothold."

" Yes," replied Beth. " He'll probably wall round his beastly rose and sweet-pea garden. I wish we could wall *him* round "

" Well, we *could*," suggested Jennifer instantly. " He's gone to bed by this time. They say he goes to bed frightfully early."

Flip's eyes glistened. She took the trowel. " Dare we ? " she murmured, without waiting for an answer.

" Steady on ! " said Beth. " Here—my turn, Flip Stod ! He's my enemy. Give *me* the trowel ! "

" All right ; we'll take turn and turn about, one to lay on the cement, and three to watch. 'Sh ! Who's that ? There, in, the distance—look !—between the two elms in

the upper drive? Get behind the hollies—quick."

Noiselessly they crept behind a thicket of holly, and four pairs of eyes watched Miss Clemence and Miss MacCarthy post two letters in the box by the great gates and retrace their steps to the house.

"Now," said Flip.

Once more the conspirators stole out, and this time the deed was concluded without interruption. Each girl had a delicious turn at the plastering.

"Heaven send he doesn't try to get out till it's hardened," said the girls as they hastened towards the school. "Early to-morrow we'll make a point of just passing that way."

They were as good as their word. Next morning saw them lightly clad and ready for a "run," a form of exercise much in vogue before the breakfast hour at "Dunces," and allowed by the authorities, provided the run did not take the runners beyond the school drive. They sprinted down the drive in twos, and were ready to whoop with delight when, on rounding the bend which brought

the lodge into view, they spied Iffley tugging at his gate. His face was fiery red. With one hand he was shaking the bars of his gate violently, but with no effect.

"Good morning, Mr. Iffley," said Flip, with great politeness. "Pleasant morning for a wrestle! What has your gate done to make you so ratty?"

Iffley glared.

"Can we help you at all?" queried Beth. "The gate seems tight."

Iffley's wart seemed to radiate fire. The hairs stood out stiffly.

"Shall we fetch a carpenter, perhaps?" asked Jennifer.

"Or a mason?" suggested Thomas.

Iffley swore.

"Oh, naughty!" ejaculated Flip, "and before our young ears too! Can't we help you over the gate?"

"If I don't make you young varmints pay for this, my name isn't Iffley," spluttered the gardener. "You want a good thrashing, every one of 'ee. If you was my maidens!"

"I've no doubt we should catch it hot,

Mr. Iffley," said Flip, "but luckily we are on this side of the gate. If you're sure we can't lend you a hand or a leg up, we must be going. It's nearly breakfast-time."

The four ran off and ate their meal with digestions unimpaired by the thought of the gardener's gate firmly plastered to his wall. Only when they began to collect their belongings for first lesson did the affair begin to look a little less rosy in retrospect.

"We were asses to go down and chaff him, I expect," said Jennifer. "Suppose he reports us to Barney? He knows Beth's name, and he knows which house we're in."

"We may have chaffed him, but that doesn't prove we plastered up his beastly gate. Not a spark of evidence against us."

"Yes, but suppose Barney asks us point blank if we did it?" said Thomas.

Flip looked a little uncomfortable. She was no liar.

"She won't. And anyway I don't believe

Iffley will report us. It would make him look such a fool."

"Nobody minds looking a fool if it brings vengeance." Beth spoke oracularly. "His wart looked vengeful enough this morning, Heaven knows."

Remembrance could not but make the four chuckle, and still chuckling they went to first lesson. All went as usual until last lesson before break when a Sixth Form girl came in and communed a moment with Miss Thomas, who was taking the Fourth for history. Beth thought Miss Thomas glanced in her direction, and was not therefore wholly surprised when, at the close of the period, her name was read out with Flip's, Thomas's, and Jennifer's. She was, however, astonished at the destination assigned them. Her gloomiest forecast had not taken her beyond an interview with Barney. Alas! their doom was to meet Miss Courtney herself.

"And Barney'll be rabid about it, too," said Flip, as they made their way to the Head's room. "She's infuriated by rows that go outside the house. She'll say: 'You might at least have taken thought for

the reputation of your house even if you cared nothing for your own good names.' Lord! What an awful thing pi-jaw is! Iffley'll get his vengeance all right. Come on, let's get it over. You knock, Beth."

"No, you."

"You, Jennifer—but wait half a jiff while I lick this stain off my finger."

She was still licking hard when the door suddenly opened and Miss Courtney appeared.

"Why are you loitering here?" she asked.

"I was . . . er . . . looking at my fingers, Miss Courtney," answered Flip fatuously.

Thomas giggled.

Miss Courtney recognised Flip.

"I remember now," she said. "Come here, all of you."

The four entered obediently. It was their first visit to the Head's sanctum, and in spite of tremors they looked around with some curiosity. It was a pretty room, not at all the kind of room in which to expect a row. Low, inviting chairs, a polished floor with lovely blue rugs (Thomas stood safely

on one and hoped she would not be called upon to move — she always slipped on polished floors, and saw herself knocking over something precious and being hanged at dawn), bookcases all round the walls, and, in a vase by an open window, some most glorious roses which Beth grudgingly recognised as Iffley's productions.

"They are beautiful, aren't they?" said Miss Courtney.

Whereupon the girls took courage. Seemingly the Head had invited them up for a courteous chat. All agreed that the roses were beautiful.

"Iffley is the finest grower of roses in Devon, and the school ought to be proud of him. He could do better for himself, you know, but he sticks to us."

The four said nothing until Jennifer, whose social conscience was lively, murmured noncommittally, "Yes, Miss Courtney."

"You don't apparently like him?" went on the Head. "What's the matter with him?"

She suddenly turned and looked at the girls straightly.

What were they to say? They stared at the polished floor, heartily wishing they could slip down in its reflecting depths. Surely Miss Courtney would go on talking and not leave them in the air like this? But Miss Courtney seemed in no hurry to do any further conversing. The silence was becoming oppressive, and Thomas, who could not not stand pressure, blurted out:

"His . . . his wart, Miss Courtney, on his . . . his nose."

"Yes," said Miss Courtney, unsmilingly. "I admit that he has a wart—on his nose."

Beth broke in hastily. What a fool Thomas was!

"Of course it isn't his wart, Miss Courtney. We know he can't help that. It's . . . it's the plots—the robin, you know—and he's always fussing about his tools, and I didn't lose his rake. Jen knows I never use it, and if I do I always put it back—don't I, Jen?"

"Yes," supported Jennifer promptly.

Miss Courtney summed up.

"Iffley accused you of losing his rake—which apparently you both do and don't use.

He obeyed my instructions in taking over the old garden plots, and he has a wart—on his nose. Anything else ? "

" It's . . . it's his whole self, Miss Courtney," spluttered Flip. " He's . . . he's so *maddening*."

" We can't exactly help our whole selves, Philippa," said the Head. " I haven't the slightest doubt that Iffley finds you maddening, as you put it. Anything else ? "

The four looked rather foolish. When they came to think of it, there really wasn't anything else.

" And for this," the Head went on, " you cement his gate and cause him—and me—most serious trouble." She looked at the girls' faces and knew that Iffley's surmise had been correct.

" I take it you were responsible for the silly and babyish trick ? " she continued.

" Yes, Miss Courtney," they murmured.

" And further, you spoke to him in a particularly unladylike way this morning ? "

" Well, he wasn't particularly gentlemanly," muttered Flip, remembering the swear.

"What was that, Philippa? Speak out, please!" rapped the Head sharply.

"I only said it was a nice morning, Miss Courtney," said Flip, who had no intention of giving Iffley away. But the hint of impertinence in the answer roused Miss Courtney's wrath.

"Understand," she said, "I will not have girls making themselves a nuisance to Iffley or to any one else. The money for repairing the wall and gate will be stopped out of your pocket-money, and you will be confined to school and the first garden for the next fortnight. Extra gym will compensate you for lack of exercise. Your shoulders need straightening, Maisie; you hold yourself very ill. I was noticing your carriage when you were walking in front of me yesterday. On the Wednesday afternoons you will go to the English room for additional spelling. In a certain document recently received by me you prove the need of it. Good morning all! And remember," as the four turned to go, "I have been most lenient. Should any further trouble of the same kind occur you will be dealt with severely."

"Lenient!" groaned Flip when she was safely out of earshot.

"I like that."

"You were an ass to sound so cheeky, Flip," said Jennifer. "That riled her."

"What did she mean about the spelling?" put in Beth.

"I believe we had the word 'bequeath' wrong in the robin," said Thomas. "I know I thought it looked funny and meant to look it up. Fancy her remembering."

"Precious little *she* doesn't remember," said Flip. "Oh, oh, oh—no money for a single ice!"

"Extra gym!" groaned Thomas.

"Long lists of beastly words to write out!" wailed Jennifer.

It was a pity for Iffley's outraged dignity that he could not behold his enemies fallen. No punishment could have been felt more bitterly by them. In the height of the summer term to be cut off from the joys of bathing and be made to spell and straighten their shoulders! They raged and cursed by all their gods—not, alas! themselves, nor, strangely enough, Miss Courtney; but Iffley.

"We'll be even with him yet," Flip murmured before turning over for the night, and Thomas spent most of the next day composing a new "Ballad of the Wart."

CHAPTER XI

THE AMATEUR TYPISTS

THE punishment of being confined to straight bounds was much more severely felt at "Dunces" than in most girls' schools, because of the greater amount of liberty normally enjoyed. No girl was allowed to leave the school grounds alone, but, in twos and threes, girls above the Lower Fourth had a fair range. One cove was within bounds — indeed it was reached by a private path from the school — and this was the favourite haunt of all Dunscombites in summer weather.

To be cut off from this was a very real punishment, and our four had in addition been deprived of the park and woods. They had been sentenced to the most severe form of confinement practised at Dunscombe.

In school parlance it was known as being "confined to privet hedge" or "priveted," because a privet fence marked the bounds beyond which a convicted sinner might not pass.

Flip fretted most against the confinement, because she had more physical energy than the others. She had always been used to quartering the country freely with her brothers. Beth and Thomas felt it least, because Beth had always her beloved botany, and there were plenty of interesting plants in the first garden, and Thomas was a reader. Curled up in some comfortable nook with a story, she did not particularly care whether she went to the cove or not. Jennifer had the dresses for the tableau to occupy her thoughts; and then, too, both Jennifer and Thomas were often occupied with returned written exercises.

There was no doubt about it. Jennifer's handwriting was not elegant, and so far had resisted all the efforts of Miss Case to turn it into something handsome. Jennifer had many times complained that a good third of her time at "Dunces" was spent in re-

writing work for the great E. V., and that rewritten, the said work looked no more beautiful than before. Flip's handwriting was bold and clear ; Beth, who loved drawing and hated unsightliness, wrote a really distinguished hand ; but Jennifer's resembled the hieroglyphics of the ancients, and Thomas's showed the course of a spider on trek.

The Thursday after the events narrated in the last chapter, when the punishment had still a weary week to run, Flip wandered disconsolately into No. 8, seeking occupation. She had come from the gym, where she had been vainly pretending to enjoy herself, but gym apparatus palled on a sunny day. In No. 8 she found Thomas and Jennifer viciously digging into paper with two execrable fountain pens.

" Hello ! At it again ? " she said affably. It was soothing to find two people worse off than herself. " Shall I do some ? "

" You know very well that E. V. can spot your writing a mile off," retorted Jennifer. " Your great writing is like

nobody else's on earth — regular Giants' Causeway."

"I daresay I could make it small and bad enough to pass muster if I tried hard," teased Flip. "Give us a pen. What are you writing, anyway?"

"We've both got the whole of those beastly English essays to rewrite. It's a confounded shame. E. V. just draws her pen through the lot to save herself the trouble of reading when she's feeling that way. Look at this! Thank Heaven I only did three pages. Thomas did six. Catch me! I call it downright mean of Ethel V. to scratch through all that. Tom took no end of trouble over it! And what's the use?"

"I ought to have written it out neatly before I gave it in, I know," said Thomas. "But I do hate re-writing things. I always begin making my essay up all afresh as I go on, and then in a minute I'm writing just as badly as ever. Read this out to me, Flip; then I'll be done heaps quicker."

"But if she's reading out, I shall make

mistakes in mine," objected Jennifer. "You sheer off, Flip."

"What a pity we haven't a private printing press!" said Flip. "You just put your stuff in looking a ghastly mess and it comes out glorious. We had a man staying with us once — he was writing a book on military tactics — and you should have seen his writing and the mistakes! All scribbled in the margin. And the crossings out! E. V. would have had an absolutely purple fit. And do you know he had things back called 'proofs,' all neat and lovely and smelling like the morning paper. That would be the snappy kind of wheeze for us to have. Slap in your returned work, turn a little handle! Click! Hey, presto! Something to delight the Case for ever!"

"A typewriter is all right, too," chimed in Thomas. "Mother's secretary has one, and she does Mother's poems and things on it, and they look topping."

Flip sat up. Here was something for her bored self. "There are typewriters in

school," she said. "Three or four in No. 15. I noticed them particularly when Miss Clemence sent me to Miss Stubbs for those new Science books."

Miss Stubbs was the school secretary.

"I wish we could use one then." Thomas spoke feelingly. "I know how to put in the paper and all that, and I can type with one finger, though I can't do it with all my fingers like Miss Barris. She does it like playing the piano. Rattles it over like one o'clock."

"Can you really put in the paper?" asked Flip.

"Yes," said Thomas, "if the machine's a Corona. Mother's is a Corona, and Miss Barris has often let me try it. I told Mother I should always use a typing machine when I grew up, but she says the vulgar clicking drives away inspiration, and that a true servant of the Muse writes with a quill."

Flip recognised this and smiled. "Give me the click," she said in her most Philistine manner. "Anyway, I'm going to No. 15 to bag one of the little clickers.

What a joke to give in our essays to E. V. all typed!"

"Make her sit up, wouldn't it?" laughed Jennifer. "Half a tick! I'll come with you."

In a few minutes they returned, staggering under the weight of a Remington.

"Put it on Beth's table," gasped Jennifer. "More room there. And stand by with a blazer, somebody, to throw it over if somebody pops in. Now, Tom, my boy, how does the giddy thing work? Is it anything like yours at home?"

"Not much," said Thomas. "This is a lot bigger. But I expect they all work much the same. We want special paper though."

"That'll be in No. 15, too, won't it?" inquired Flip. "Come on, Jen, we may as well scrounge some of that."

The two again disappeared, and when they returned they drew from the legs of their under-garments many sheets of typing paper.

"Lucky we stuck it out of sight," grinned Flip. "We met the Clem on the way back.

I was awfully afraid my elastic wouldn't stand the strain. Do you remember that time when Beth tucked two apples away, and the elastic broke, and they rolled out right under E. V.'s nose? That was a joke! Now, Thomas, commence operations."

Thomas had evidently watched Miss Barris to some purpose. She inserted a sheet of paper successfully and adjusted it.

"Print the title first," commanded Flip, and Thomas typed laboriously with her forefinger:

the u-chan:i-g eazt

"Looks a bit rum," said Flip. "You've over-punctuated it, young Tom. Where's the India rub?"

"That won't do it," advised Thomas. "You want ink eraser. There's proper type eraser really."

Some ink eraser was produced, and the title was put right. Slowly Thomas proceeded to the first line of her essay.

"Takes a jolly long time, doesn't it?" remarked Jennifer judicially. "I'm going

on writing, and I'll look in again when you've got up some speed. You carry on."

"We should be years typing the essays!" said Flip. "I say, isn't there something shorter we could do? Couldn't we type a love-letter to Iffley or something like that?"

"We could surely do something to Iffley." Beth had by this time joined her comrades. "Let's write and tell him he's won the motor-car at Ecclesmouth Fête!"

"We shouldn't be there to see his face when he found he hadn't," said Flip. "We must see that, else it's no fun."

"But if we see, we're caught," objected Beth, "and I'm dashed if I want to be priveted again. If last time was Miss Courtney's notion of leniency, I don't want to see her severe, thank you very much. Still, we mustn't waste a good typewriter while we have it. What *can* we do?"

"Write and tell him what we think of him," cried Thomas.

"Language wouldn't stand it," said Flip.

"No, we want to think of a really good rise. What's Iffley keen on?"

"Himself," grunted Beth.

"That's like Malvolio, sick of self-love. I say," said Thomas excitedly, "write a letter and drop it in his way, like Maria did for Malvolio and——"

"We can't make him think the Courtney is in love with him," chuckled Flip, while the others rolled on their chairs at the exquisite idea. "But there's something *in* your suggestion, Thomas. What can we write?—that's the point? What's the right kind of bait for him?"

"Miss Courtney sends him notes sometimes when she wants flowers and things. I've seen girls drop them in the box by Iffley's little gate and ring a bell."

"I've got it," said Flip. "We'll type him a note to say Miss Courtney has a friend who would like to be taken round the garden, and would Iffley meet her in the little rockery at a certain time. If there's one thing Iffley loathes, it's showing people round the garden. I've heard him grumbling about it to Snook. Wastes his time, and then he's

got to be so beastly polite too. We'll have him on toast."

"Don't see it myself," said Beth. "There wouldn't be a lady, and anyway we couldn't watch."

"There *will* be a lady," replied Flip, "because I'll be it—her—she . . . what is it? I tell you I'm bored stiff with louting about so much. I'll get a cousin to send me some things for dressing up, and it will be gorgeous."

"It'll have to be two ladies," corrected Jennifer. "I should love to dress up like that, and my sister would send me topping clothes. How soon can we do it?"

They began to reckon out the time required for the transmission of the garments.

"To-day Thursday, leave Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday—let's do it Tuesday! What sport! But listen! Suppose we meet Miss Courtney in the grounds. Iffley'd think it odd if she passed her friends with nary a word to them."

"We shan't meet her if we do it Tuesday," said Flip. "She always goes to golf

Tuesdays, and if we should meet any of the other mistresses they'll just think we're friends of the Head. We must wear hats and all, of course. Let's do the letter now, then we can put back the typer."

Between them they concocted what they considered a suitable epistle from a headmistress to her gardener, but were much puzzled about the signature.

"Miss Stubbs initials the Courtney's letters, and says it's for the Courtney. She sent one to Aunt Clarissa when I hurt my arm at hockey that time. Scoot out, Thomas, and look at one of the notices on the board initialed by Miss Stubbs. Half a tick, though; I've a finished book initialed by her."

Laboriously they imitated the secretary's signature and then wrote for the required clothes.

"I look a topping lady in Nesta's clothes," gloated Jennifer. "If only she'll send me a decent hat! It's risky sending hats through the post, and she may only risk a horror."

"Shouldn't think Iffley had any taste in

hats anyway," said Flip, " judging from Mrs. Iffley on Sundays."

Time seemed to go slowly to the four until the day arrived for putting the plan into execution. On Tuesday morning the postman brought the required parcels and, once assured of this, Flip told Doreen Hitchens casually that there was a note to be dropped into Iffley's letter-box, but that she herself couldn't go, being priveted, and would Doreen take it ? Quite unsuspecting, Doreen moved off with the typed envelope.

The girls had fixed on three o'clock for the time, and at two No. 8 was a home of muffled laughter. Lip-stick and make-up had been obtained from the theatrical cupboard, and with a little judicious aid from these Flip and Jennifer utterly transformed themselves into a pair of fashionable ladies. Thomas and Beth acted as ladies' maids, not without wishing they themselves were to share the fun. Just before the appointed hour two elegant females might have been seen moving gracefully towards the little rockery.

Would Iffley turn up or would he smell a rat? That was the burning question. They had not been in the rockery five minutes before he hurried up and apologised in his surly fashion for his lateness. He asked what the ladies most wished to see.

"Oh, everything, please," gushed Flip. "We are *so* interested in gardening. *Do* show us your *wonderful* roses first."

Resignedly Iffley led the way. He knew this sort! They would take up a solid hour of his time, and his wart smarted in slow wrath. Jennifer and Flip had their work cut out to play their parts, but they did the thing thoroughly and wore Iffley's patience to ribbons with their feverish "interest."

At last the school garden was thoroughly exhausted. It was then that Jennifer startled Flip.

"Miss Courtney tells us you have a charming garden yourself," she said. "Would you be so very kind as to add to your favours by showing us that? You see we love flowers *so* much."

Iffley grunted but did not refuse. Flip

gave Jennifer's hand a delighted squeeze. To view the secret garden! To view it with its unwilling owner as showman! Nothing could be funnier.

They were inclined to modify their opinion, however, when they realised the number of girls they would have to face in the drive. Half the school seemed to be walking lodgewards; and who was this coming briskly towards them? The familiar striped silk frock and the hat with a bow to match the stripe gave the girls an awful qualm. They looked at each other, pretending to chat in an animated way, so that their faces should not offer a steady target for gimlet eyes. But Barney hardly glanced at the smart, unknown ladies with the gardener, and merely gave the gardener a friendly nod and smile. The school always averred that mistresses played up shamelessly to the gardener, in order to keep their rooms well supplied with flowers.

Flip and Jennifer began to draw breath more easily, and in another minute they were inside the straight gate, partly new since their own escapade, and were staring in

genuine admiration at the beautiful beds. Jennifer was almost startled out of her borrowed dislike of the gardener. If he could do this, well! he certainly had points. Even Flip was amazed at the riot of colour, but was too much bent on getting a peach out of Iffley to give her mind to it.

"*Very* beautiful!" she murmured in a well-bred way. "And your peaches too! Cool, refreshing fruit is so delicious on a hot day. They set one longing, you know." She smiled engagingly. But Iffley was not to be had. He listened stolidly to the compliments, and grunted an occasional "yes" or "no" in answer. The girls began to experience a sense of defeat. It would be fine to go back and tell Beth and Thomas that they had been in *the* garden, but ten times finer to take back something tangible in the shape of fruit or flower. Flip began to wonder whether a lady could possibly pick a flower with a sweet apology, but she wasn't at all sure that Iffley wasn't capable of boxing the ears of any lady who dared such sacrilege. Besides, what she wanted was a

peach, and would the boldest visitor steal a peach ?

She meditated these questions, gazing the while at larkspurs with lyric enthusiasm ; but no brilliant solution occurred to her.

By this time they had reached the back of the house, and it began to look as though there could be no further excuse for lingering. They could hardly ask to go inside to gaze at Mrs. Iffley's glorious sauce-pans or wax eloquent over the back-door scraper. They were preparing a suitable speech of thanks and thinking of a graceful exit when a sudden piercing cry broke the silence of the garden. The girls turned pale, and Iffley began to run towards the house ; but before he could reach it a little girl of about eight years of age darted out of the other door nearest the girls. The skirt of her frock was on fire, and as the air caught the flame it shot up towards her face and made her scream with terror. Iffley turned, but stood for an instant petrified with fear.

" Daddy ! Daddy ! " cried the child.

Flip reached her first. She threw her to

the ground and rolled her over and over on the grass till the flames were extinguished.

The gardener seemed overcome with emotion. He held the child to him and turned to his visitors.

"I can never thank you properly," he began, then stopped and stared in amazement. Flip's hat had fallen off, and the girl was looking frankly through the eyes of the erstwhile sophisticated lady.

"It's all right, Mr. Iffley." Flip spoke in her natural voice. "It's Jennifer and me. We were playing a trick on you because Miss Courtney gave us such a fearful doing when you reported us about the gate. We shall get into a worse hole this time, I expect."

"Come in," said the gardener gruffly. Carrying the child in his arms, he went into the kitchen, followed by the two girls. The rest of the Iffley family had gone out, not expecting the little one back from school until the usual hour. Returning home early, and finding the coast clear, she had seized the opportunity to try to reach from the kitchen mantelpiece a china dog with which

she loved to play. As she stood in front of the fireplace the draught had blown her flimsy skirt into the fire.

She was still sobbing convulsively. Iffley looked round helplessly, and Flip, too, seemed a little out of her element. It was Jennifer who took command this time.

"Give her to me, Mr. Iffley," she said, "and you look for some clean soft rag and some sweet oil."

She took the child gently in her arms and tried to quiet her. As far as could be judged, she had been saved from any bad burns by Flip's promptness, but the right arm had suffered. This she soothed with the oil which Iffley had been able to find.

Gradually the little one's cries grew fainter. She nestled against Jennifer, who sat in the stiff-backed chair and rocked her quietly. It hardly seemed possible that this was the schoolgirl whom Flip had never before seen in any attitude of tenderness to one younger than herself. Flip felt awkward, and was not a little relieved at the arrival of Mrs. Iffley. Explanations were hastily made, and the child was comforted by the mother, who,

when she had convinced herself that the burns were not serious, turned to her visitors. Her thanks, simple and sincere, went to the hearts of both girls, who were now anxious to be off, to hide the feelings of which they were half ashamed. This was the Mrs. Iffley about whom they had jested, whom they had thought so remote from themselves and so different. They had penetrated beneath the veil of surface life and laughter and petty feuds and minor differences of social rank and manners. It flashed into Flip's mind that here was something better than games. She said little, but seldom had she hated anything more than the fashionable hat which she was bound to resume as she left the cottage.

"We didn't mean anything," she said apologetically. "We only did it for a lark —didn't we, Jen? We didn't mean to be horrid, Mrs. Iffley — honest Injun, we didn't."

"I know!" was the reply.

The two girls went towards the garden gate, but before they could reach it they were joined by the gardener, who had left

the kitchen some minutes before. He put a little covered basket into Flip's hand.

"Don't ee bother to return the basket," he said gruffly, "and we'll let bygones be bygones, I'll allow."

The two went soberly up the drive. This was all so different from anything they had expected, and the contact with the more serious things of life had affected them both. It was not until they reached the school that the old stream seemed to flow back over them again; but it was a normal Flip and a nearly normal Jennifer who rushed into No. 8, to wave before the eyes of their startled room-mates delicious peaches given them by the gardener.

"Iffley's topping," announced Flip.

"And Mrs. Iffley's a darling," said Jennifer.

It was a long time before No. 8 knew the actual facts of that afternoon's adventure, but they were told sufficient to put two and two together for themselves. Even Beth buried her feud with Iffley, who, greatly to Miss Courtney's astonishment, became the champion and adviser of the four.

"We find we like warts," had been Beth's reply when the Head, finding her in possession of one of Iffley's most cherished rose-cuttings, had smilingly queried her relations with the gardener.

CHAPTER XII

WORDSWORTH'S LIGHT TWO-STROKE

THE actions and re-actions of Iffley passed out of the current as upon the joyous and the care-free drifted down with inevitable force the terminal examinations. Suddenly, so it seemed to No. 8, the whole school was plunged into work. Girls whose whole existence was spent in baffling all attempts of mistresses at instilling a little information now of their own accord stuck their noses into Algebra books and Latin grammars, and strove, in a few hectic hours, to make good the lapse of weeks. No. 8 caught the fever. Even Flip put her racquet into the press and left it there for a whole day. She who had hitherto scorned "all this fuss about examinations" was now as keen to get a mark or two as that inveterate mark-hunter, Ethel Macintyre herself. As

she said, it was a case of "A Scilly for a mark," and to Scilly she very heartily desired to go. Tim's remark about English being an easy subject remained with her, and, in spite of the gloomy prognostications of her friends about E. V.'s stiff marking, she determined to concentrate on English.

"Stands to reason I can't mug up a term's work in every subject, but I can and will in one. You'll have to help me, young Tom," Flip said.

Thomas was only too willing to comply. Flip had done much to smooth the way before Thomas's awkward feet at Dunscombe, and Thomas's was a loving and grateful soul. She was an insatiable reader, with an unusual taste for biography. Miss Case would have been surprised had she known of Thomas's researches into the lives of the writers of the Romantic Revival, which period the Fourth had been studying that year.

The evening before the examination saw Thomas pouring a stream of most varied information into Flip's half-attentive ear, half attentive because, try as she would, Flip could not free her mind from pre-

occupations. Would the Colonel sport her a new racquet for the holidays, and would she and Tim be able to do some rowing among the smaller islands? In imagination she felt the oar in her hand and the delicious movement of the boat as it cut through the water in obedience to her stroke. She smelt the brown smell of Tim's fishing tackle, and saw luminous mackerel swimming for life before the dog-fish. The scene changed, and she and Tim were tinkering Rex again. The scent of the seaweed passed on to the petroly, castroly smell of machines, and her hands were a sight to make Aunt Clarissa shudder. She came back to hear Thomas say, "That's Wordsworth, mind—*Wordsworth!*"

"Yes," said Flip obediently, "I know —*Wordsworth*. One of the first of those romantic johnnies."

"That's right," and Thomas proceeded to give some details of Coleridge, Scott, Southey, Keats, Lamb, Shelley, and Byron, while Flip dreamt blissfully on, playing in imagination the games at the moment forbidden. Thomas's favourite poet was Keats, and Flip

was brought back to the subject in hand as Thomas remarked: "You know we had to learn the 'Ode to Autumn.' Suppose we have to write out a bit of it; can you?"

"No," replied Flip promptly.

"But you recited the second verse!" declared Thomas.

"I know, but Beth was whispering it to me," said Flip unblushingly. "Besides that, it was written on my blotting-paper."

"You must remember something of it," urged Thomas. "There was a lovely line about 'Thy hair soft lifted by the winnowing wind.' You must remember *that*!"

"Yes, I do recall something like that," said Flip vaguely. "It's nice. I'll keep it in my head and work it in as a quotation somewhere. You're a brick to take so much trouble with me, Tom. Listen: 'Thy hair soft lifted by the winnowing wind.' I've felt that myself, and a jolly nice feeling it is too, better than all this old poetry: 'Thy hair soft lifted by the winnowing wind.' Right-o! I'll fetch E. V. with that all right. Keen on quotations, E. V.! Come on! let's go to bed now."

"But I haven't told you about *The Merchant of Venice* yet," said Thomas conscientiously.

"Is your name Shylock? Shylock is me name," chanted Flip, with a melodramatic snarl. "I'm a dog at *The Merchant of Venice*, Tom; no need to prime me with that:

> "The cabbage served at 'Dunces' is not strained;
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the plate beneath——"

Don't you remember, Jen made up a whole string of it—how colanders were an attribute to God Himself, but 'Dunces' was above enamelled sway? I'll be all right for *The Merchant*. It was those romantic chappies I couldn't remember about, but now I know about Wordsworth's life I'll be all serene."

"It wasn't all about Wordsworth that I told you." Thomas looked doubtful. "A lot of it was about the others—Scott and Lamb, you know. You're sure you remember, Flip? Shall I tell you again?"

"No, thanks," cried Flip. "I remember fine." With her head comfortably full of stock to be produced on the morrow, she

retired to what she considered well-earned slumber.

Next morning found a sobered IVA dipping anxious pens into ink-pots and writing their names on the top right-hand corner of glistening, smooth-lined sheets. Clean pads of pink blotting-paper adorned the desks, and the desks themselves were placed with mathematical precision one behind the other with even spaces between the rows. As a priestess to a temple, E. V. entered with the papers. On every desk a paper was placed face downwards. E. V. consulted her watch, and announced in sepulchral tones :

" You may turn over your papers and begin. You have until eleven o'clock."

There was a rustle as IVA turned over the question papers and scanned them with speculative eyes. Some girls smiled ; some frowned. Flip was radiant. Her eye had caught sight of Question 6 :

Ques. 6. *Write a short essay on Wordsworth.*

Wordsworth ! The very johnny Thomas had gassed about yesterday evening ! Flip glanced at her triumphantly and seized her

pen. She gnawed its handle a moment and plunged into the following :

" Wordsworth, the star turn among romantic writers, was born in the Inner Temple on the borders of Scotland, where he grew up a fine athletic youth but stuttering. Unfortunately, however, insanity was in this talented family, and after writing the famous *Tales from Shakespeare*, he killed his unfortunate grandmother with a carving knife and began to take opium to deaden the pangs of remorse which were now gnawing at his vitals. [Flip re-read this last sentence with delighted appreciation.] Because of this, few of his really famous poems are really finished, and this is especially to be regretted in the case of his famous *Don Juan*, in which he was relating the story of his own poetic youth when, on a light two-stroke, an admirable Rex Acme, he rode the fells, his ' hair soft lifted by the winnowing wind.' [Flip heaved a sigh of relief at having got off her quotation. She felt a little doubtful about Rex, but was sure Thomas had talked at one time about horses and speed. Probably

it was near enough. E. V. wouldn't stay to look up what make it was. She continued her efforts, her tongue well out.] Wordsworth had many affairs of the heart, and his poetry is particularly full of great passion, as an example of which we may note his famous poem *The Excursion*. *Ivanhoe* is another effort of this famous bard. But perhaps his greatest effort, and one for which he must live for ever on the rolls of fame, is his *Essays of Elia*. With this, and with his famous poem *After Blenheim*, we must leave him, considering that, in his own admired words, his life was 'a famous victory.' "

After this grand effort Philippa, feeling that virtue had gone out of her, went lightly on to the remaining questions. For the context question (compulsory) she adopted the time-honoured, though not particularly successful, method of appealing to the goddess Fortune. She wrote down the names of the only five poets she could think of and impartially assigned a quotation to each.

When the examination was over, she listened with a smile to the exclamations of her companions.

"What a beastly paper! Did W. W. write 'The moon doth with delight'?"

Who were they to be talking of William Wordsworth before such an authority as herself? True, she had assigned the quotation about the moon to William Shakespeare. She could have sworn there was a remark about the moon in *The Merchant of Venice*. But then her essay! Good enough, she was sure, to wangle some marks and a trifling eulogy in a report out of Miss Case.

She joined her friends in No. 8, particularly satisfied with her performance, and, remarking that as she was so safe in English, she needn't look up any science, she began bracing the handle of her hockey stick. Winter would be on them before they could turn round, and one ought to see to sticks and things so as to be ready. She spent a happy evening. By the time the stick was completed to her satisfaction, the others had finished stewing, and all set to work on the dresses for the tableau.

For the next four days IVA was hard at work on other examination papers. Beth loved the botany, and even Flip did something. There was a question on the ash, and, as she said, "You can't look an ash in the face every day for a month without knowing how its hair curls." She was most disappointed in the practical science. She couldn't remember how the experiments were conducted, so boldly tried fresh ways and means, nearly blowing off her own head and everybody else's. She got results, but such results! Still, as she complacently remarked, science wasn't really her subject; she was a literary light and would no doubt serve the Muse one day. This in private to Beth. Not for worlds would she have jested of Thomas's mother in Thomas's presence.

The next excitement was waiting for the results. Beth was top for botany; Jennifer near the middle in everything; Flip near the bottom; Thomas varying in different subjects from near the top to the bottom place, which Flip declared had been taken from her. The English results were the

last to come. E. V., remote on Olympus, never hurried over her papers. Report had it that she entertained a familiar spirit who would only work upon occasion, and that this same familiar didn't like girls and made their marks as low as he could. He seemed to have given full vent to his spite this time, for when E. V. appeared one morning with a list (she never stuck it on the notice board like other mistresses, but read it out to make it more awful), her face was noticeably grim. She moved to her place on the dais and surveyed IVA.

"I suppose some of you have something popularly known among yourselves as brains," she began. "You guard them closely and keep them tenderly from overwork. I have, in my time, corrected papers not distinguished for clarity and precision, but never, —no, never—have I come across a set to equal in futility and ignorance those worked by you this term."

She paused for breath and Flip took occasion to whisper to Beth, "A good number of pennies in the slot this morning!"

She would have done better not to call

attention to herself. Miss Case pounced upon her.

"Stand up, Philippa," she said.

Flip rose to her feet obediently, and the Case fixed her with horn-rimmed eyes.

"Your light, Philippa," she pronounced, "would have been better under a bushel, but since you insist on placing it upon a candlestick—come here."

Flip moved forward to the front of the class, while Thomas, who could not have endured such shameful publicity, went hot and cold by turns.

"Stand there," ordered Miss Case, and Flip stood there. She was not enjoying herself. E. V. was in the mood to be cutting, and she dealt with Flip faithfully and unsparingly. She read aloud the essay on Wordsworth, commenting thereon with biting emphasis.

The "star turn," the "athletic youth," the "carving knife," the "opium," the "vitals," and the strong peppering of "famouses" all served their turn as texts for E. V., and she did not spare Flip's beautifully muddled facts. When she came to the

"Rex Acme" words failed her. She read it out and stood silent. But no pointing was needed for IVA to enjoy this remark. The idea of William Wordsworth taking delivery of a motor-bike, and scaring the cuckoos as he tore up and down Dunmail-Raise, was too much for them. Sympathise with Flip as they might, they could not contain themselves. Even Beth, indignant at this exposure of her friend, laughed the tears into her eyes, and Thomas ached within. Perhaps their laughter mollified the Case. She did not finish reading the essay, but motioned Flip to her seat, after bidding her to a private interview that afternoon. Flip, her cheeks aflame, gladly sought refuge in the anonymity of the class, which had to listen as a unit to a fiery denunciation by Miss Case of its inertia, stupidity, crass ignorance, and blatant conceit. On the whole, the class enjoyed itself. It was a break in the monotony, and when the Case let herself go she did the thing in the grand manner. She singled out no more individuals, and the bell brought to a full stop as good a general philippic as she had ever delivered.

Flip was bombarded with witticisms as soon as the door closed on the English mistress.

"Did he carry plenty of spares about with him, Flip?" asked some one.

"Are you sure it was a Rex, Flip?" chimed in another. "Rudge is an old firm, you know."

"Was he ever had up for exceeding the speed limit, Flip?"

"Or for having an inefficient silencer?"

"Did the bike back-fire, Flip?"

"Or give trouble with the kick-starter?"

Flip grinned friendly retorts at these jests. She was used to teasing.

"Well, anyhow," she said, "none of you were generous enough to give the poor chap even a push-bike. I've done the handsome thing by him. Just see how well it'll sound in a P.S. to his biography: 'Presented with a decent motor-bike by Flip Stoddart and Tom Crantock.' You beggar, Tom! Whatever did you tell me about speed?"

"That was De Quincey," said Thomas: "*The Glory of Motion*. Don't you remember Flip, we did it in class?"

"How fast did he go anyway?"

"Oh, about fifteen miles an hour in a coach."

Flip looked contemptuous. "Glad I didn't give him the bike anyway. Sheer waste! But look here, Tom. Why didn't you tell me Wordsworth never had one? You said he was sporting."

"I'm most awfully sorry, Flip," stammered Thomas. "I—I—never thought——

"How any one could be such an ass!" said Flip good-humouredly. "Never mind, old kid, you did your best for me, and I'm always putting my foot in it. I'll never get to Scilly now." She spoke wistfully.

"Borrow Wordsworth's Rex and go, Flip," suggested Doreen Hichens. "'Sh . . . 'sh . . . here's Miss MacCarthy."

It is to be feared that the Botany mistress found her class a little inattentive. Before the end of the lesson Thomas had produced the following, which was passed round under the desks:

"While Wordsworth was a-drowsing,
A-drowsing in the sky,
He heard a horn a-hooting,
And some one shouted, 'Hi!'

'Is your name Bill Wordsworth?'
The poet answered, 'Yes.'
'Well then,' announced the messenger,
'This is your bike, I guess.

''Tis from a girl.' 'Ah, Lucy!'
Said Wordsworth, with a skip.
'No, no,' replied the messenger,
'The damsel's name is Flip.

'Flip Stoddart is her name, sir,
And England is her nation,
And in the school called Dunscombe Cleeve
She eats her daily ration.

'She loves your poems greatly, sir,
And writes them down on paper,
And says them with such pep, sir,
She makes her mistress caper.

'And so this little present
She has thought fit to send;
And if you'll take delivery
I must be off, my friend.'

He showed the start to William,
And showed the petrol too;
Then said he must be going,
And waved a tootaloo.

And William started up, sir,
And sat upon that jigger,
And now he's riding all the time,
Yes, riding like a nigger.

He's only got one hope, sir,
  One only hope has he—
He's fall'n desperately in love
  With dear velocity—

That next examination day
  His lucky, lucky star
Will make some other IVA girl
  Present him with a CAR."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TABLEAUX

MAISIE-THOMAS CRANTOCK, lying dreamily in bed, often wished herself a hero. Things seemed to happen to Flip Stoddart, but they never happened to her. Flip had saved a baby's life that term, and certainly she had saved the gardener's little daughter from being terribly burned. Yet Flip seemed to go on her reckless way without a thought of herself, whereas Thomas was for ever involved in day-dreams of which she herself was the centre. She saw the school ablaze, and herself rescuing her study-mates. In fancy she even gave her life for one of them, and imagined the flowers the girls would strew on her tomb. In fancy, too, she played tennis matches; danced most bewildering and difficult dances before an admiring school; executed wonderful

swallow dives, and saved Beth from drowning. Many were the fine acts Thomas enjoyed in dreams.

Yet so far, in actuality, Thomas had not shone at "Dunces." Her verses had amused her form; otherwise she had been an object rather of pity than admiration. True, her incredible clumsiness had a little abated, but she was still uncertain of herself, and still called down upon her head sharp reprimands which she repeated over and over in imagination to the blistering of her mind and the shrivelling of her powers.

The thought of the coming competitions was agony. After endless discussion, and because of a secret which Thomas had confided to Flip, the girls of No. 8 had joined with those of No. 10 to give as a tableau the Masque in *The Tempest*. Much time had been given to the making of the dresses and the rehearsing of the picture. Flip swore that there was one scene from Shakespeare she would not forget to her dying day, and that was the Masque in *The Tempest*.

The date fixed for the competitions, like

other dates longed for and dreaded, had come steadily onwards with indivertible step, and one morning the girls woke to find the ordeal upon them. Except for the tableau, the occupants of No. 8 were not competing, all their energies having been absorbed in the one great effort. Even when the long-expected afternoon arrived, they had little ear for songs, for recitations in various languages, or for pianoforte recitals, and long wails on violins. They were dressing.

Philippa's aunt was in the audience; Thomas's mother had sailed in fine array to a place of honour near the Head, and was even now pouring into the ear of that long-suffering lady her plan for the better education of girls in general and for their better education in English in particular. The Muse, it seemed, was upon her.

In the meantime her daughter, as Ceres, was struggling into a robe of corn-coloured silk adorned with cornflowers. A crown of cornflowers was upon her head, and she carried in her arms a sheaf of corn which Flip of the persuasive tongue had begged from a neighbouring farmer.

Flip was Caliban. It had been pointed out to her that the "freckled whelp" was not in this particular picture, but she had said he must be lurking somewhere, and that Caliban she would be or nothing. She was making great play with a long tail she had made from frayed rope. A wig, similarly manufactured and much ruffled, fell over her face, made truly brutal with brown grease-paint. She was swathed in a hairy skin which she had persuaded a maid to send her from the Colonel's trophies. On all fours she was hopping round, swirling her tail and making herself a nuisance to all who were not ready.

"Do shut up, Flip!" Jennifer cried as Flip began to prance round the mirror and disorganised the fixing of diaphanous wings. "Ours is the next call, and we shall never be ready. Has any one got the safety-pins?"

"Safety-pins forward! Your ladyship shall have them. I say, Jen, you do look ripping."

Jennifer undoubtedly did look well. She had made a dress of rainbow hues from

strips of coloured paper in which to represent Iris, the "rich scarf to God's proud earth." Saffron-coloured wings were on her shoulders; her hair flowed loose under a crown of ribbons. The girls crowded round her in admiration.

"We shall get the prize for you alone, Jen. You look absolutely topping."

"Don't be a set of muts! Here, Ferdinand, your trunk hose are not quite *comme il faut*, dear man."

The others shouted with laughter. Beth, who stood very tall and manly as Ferdinand, had not well secured her nether stocks, and showed a gap which, as Flip remarked, would have put Miss Courtney to the blush and damned them all. Safety-pins were requisitioned, and Ferdinand was secured in a way fitting to his modest youth, while Margaret Chelmsford scrutinised herself as Miranda.

All admitted that Margaret ran Jennifer close. She too had long hair, but whereas Jennifer's was golden and wavy, Margaret's was black and hung without wave or ripple. The girls had arranged it in two heavy plaits,

which fell forward over her shoulders. They had dressed her in a long white nightdress of *crêpe-de-Chine*, which Jennifer's sister had lent from her trousseau. Her neck and arms were bare. The whiteness of her skin, always startling against the black hair, was emphasised by the deep red roses which Flip had begged from Iffley, and which Jennifer had cunningly entwined.

The remaining people of the picture were Juno, represented by Doris Franklin, a tall girl of statuesque proportions, dressed in an orange gown to blend with the corn-coloured raiment of Ceres. The two seemed unduly anxious, whispered together, and sometimes hummed a tune, to the amusement of all the others. Prospero had a beard which, in its snowy length, would have done honour to Father Christmas. He wore Miss Barnet-Coldridge's scholar's gown, and carried his staff with a magic air. A venerable man, he frowned at Caliban when that monster's spirits ran away with him.

For Ariel the girls had descended on the Second Form, and had brought thence an airy sprite who might have been cast for the part.

Her name was Glynn Vaughan. At eight years old she looked six or rather less. Thomas declared that she might have been found swinging on an elderberry. Her hair was brown, straight, and elfish. Face, arms, and legs were brown, and her eyes were brown and wondering, with dancing lights in them. Jennifer's idea had been to dress her as a brown moth, and the idea had been excellently carried out. The girls felt well pleased with their efforts as they put the last pin into the dainty wings and lifted Glynn from her perch on the cupboard.

"Now, don't go running about and spoil yourself, Glynn," cautioned Jennifer.

"I'll eat you up if you do," said Flip, tossing back her hair and showing her white teeth.

Glynn gave a high laugh of delicious fear.

"You can come and pat me if you like," cried Flip, and then snapped at her hand. Glynn flew off in wild glee with Caliban in pursuit, but the fun was checked as the gym mistress thrust her head into the room.

"Masque from *The Tempest* in two minutes. Come out quietly and stand in the wings."

Beth captured Ariel and quieted her. The company filed out to take their stand. When the curtain fell it would be their turn.

They shivered in the wings and thought the scene from *Twelfth Night*, which preceded their own, would never have the curtain rung down upon it. But all things come to an end, and in two minutes Jennifer, as stage manager, was arranging her picture. Juno and Ceres were placed with hands uplifted over the young couple, Ferdinand and Miranda. The colours blended well and were a credit to Jennifer's taste and skill. The cornflowers with which Ceres was decked toned with the blue of Ferdinand's doublet. Thomas had longed for scarlet poppies, but Jennifer had sternly forbidden them because of the proximity of Miranda's crimson roses.

Jennifer, as Iris, was posed not far from the goddesses; Prospero stood at a little distance, with Ariel poised for flight at his

side ; behind a tree lurked Caliban, his ugly brutishness contrasting with the beauty of the picture. Jennifer gave the signal for the curtain. It went up ; the girls remained motionless, feeling anything but happy. Not to be able to blink an eyelid was, they all confessed afterwards, a fearful worry. One and all had felt an irresistible longing to do something—either to scratch her nose or remove a tickling hair—but every girl remained creditably motionless.

There was applause from the audience, after which the curtain should have fallen. It remained obstinately up, and Juno and Ceres felt unpleasantly apprehensive. All wondered what was to happen. Suddenly a voice rose, hesitating at first, then clear and strong. It was Doris Franklin as Juno. Unaccompanied, she was singing the beautiful words of blessing on the betrothed :

> " Honour, riches, marriage, blessing,
> Long continuance, and increasing,
> Hourly joys be still upon you !
> Juno sings her blessings on you."

She ceased and the girls in the tableau held their breath. Would Thomas, as Ceres, come

up to scratch? They had never heard her sing, but Flip had assured them she could. Would she fail them?

A voice wandered into the silence, as though uncertain of its way and purpose:

"Earth's increase, and foison plenty."

And then, as though gaining confidence,

"Barns and garners never empty;
Vines with clust'ring bunches growing . . ."

There was no nervousness now. Rich and deep, without effort, the notes fell on the air, each beautiful word irradiated by the beauty of the instrument which gave it utterance.

"Plants with goodly burden bowing,
Spring come to you, at the farthest,
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you,
Ceres' blessing still is on you."

No one so dull of imagination but could picture the fruitful autumn. They felt it in the words and in the golden glow of the voice. The audience was hushed; the tiniest children held still by the spell. As the song ceased, Ceres stooped and kissed the young couple whose glad prosperity she had been

prophesying. The curtain fell, and the clapping burst out. It was undoubtedly the most applauded picture so far, and it was some time before attention could be secured for the next. In the meantime the girls of No. 8 and No. 10 were being overwhelmed with congratulations; Thomas in particular came in for praise which made her diffident heart leap.

"I wonder what Mother will think?" she said.

"We'll find her as soon as the thing is over. The guests are staying to tea, aren't they? You come with me and find my Aunt Clarissa, and then we'll collect your mother."

The two girls and Beth, who had no relatives to find, made their way among the thronging audience as soon as the competitions were over. Flip's Aunt Clarissa, looking particularly distinguished in black, with touches of scarlet, was soon found. She congratulated the girls in her quiet, gracious way, and then to Flip's infinite surprise said: "I have been wondering whether Beth and Maisie could come to

spend the first week of the holidays with us ? "

" Auntie *Claire* ! " ejaculated Flip in astonished delight.

Her face clouded. " But what about the Colonel ? He doesn't like girls, and girls we are and girls we must remain unless we dress up as boys."

" Your father will be away until the end of the week," said Aunt Clarissa serenely, " but he would in any case be pleased to meet your friends. You must remember you are growing up, Philippa."

Flip stared, then chortled.

" What a *joke* ! " she cried. " But look here ! We've got to find Tom's mother. Will you come, Auntie Claire ? "

" With pleasure," said Miss Stoddart, " but why ' Tom ' ? Maisie is a much prettier name, I think."

" She's called Maisie Morello," replied Flip, laughing. " Did you ever hear anything like it ? Tom is our name for her—plain Thomas she is."

" I, however, shall call her Maisie," and Maisie was pleased. Already she had

lost her heart to Flip's rather stately aunt.

A vision sailing down upon the four rather took Miss Stoddart's well-bred soul aback. It was Mrs. Crantock, in a wonderful peacock-blue creation, accompanied by Miss Courtney.

"Dear child!" she said, embracing Maisie with effusion. "Your voice is sweeter than the nightingale's and will be my constant source of inspiration. I will write the songs and you will sing them. Life will be one long ecstasy! Why did you never tell me before you had a voice?"

"I don't know," answered Tom ungraciously. She was pleased with her mother's praise but embarrassed.

"You must leave school and give all your time to music," went on Mrs. Crantock. "We will be constant associates. Two sister Muses! A feast of words and a feast of . . . my *dear*! Your stocking!"

Alas! for Thomas. Dubiously she had looked that morning at the one suspender remaining to her right stocking, and had decided it would last one day more. Ex-

pectation had not been enough. A horrid snap had warned her that the worst had happened, and for some minutes she had been making surreptitious grabs for the top of the troublesome hose. Her mother's embrace had taken off her attention. The errant stocking was now in full retreat.

"My *dear*!" sighed Mrs. Crantock once again.

Thomas looked at Miss Stoddart pleadingly. Why, why had the beastly stocking chosen to let itself and her down at this particular moment? Every one seemed to be looking at her. Thomas followed her usual instinct. She glanced round at them all, and in her old frightened way took to her heels, with her right hand tugging the slipping hose at intervals. She did not stop until she had reached the all-comforting seclusion of No. 8, where she was joined some time later by Flip.

In the meantime she was the theme of discussion among her elders.

"You see, Mrs. Crantock," the Head was saying, "Maisie is still very much a child and badly in need of schooling. I hope you

will give us the privilege of keeping her with us. Her musical talents can, of course, be developed; but what she most needs is the society of other girls. You, as a cultivated woman"—the Head knew when to use a little of the subtle oil of flattery—"will find her immaturity trying for many years yet, and Miss Stoddart's niece has as much to gain from Maisie as Maisie from her. They are an excellent combination; don't you agree with me, Miss Stoddart?"

Miss Stoddart did agree, and told Mrs. Crantock how much she hoped Maisie would be able to spend the first week of the holidays with Philippa. She supported the Headmistress so ably that the point was gained. Thomas was to stay on at "Dunces" and was to spend the first week of the holidays with Beth at Flip's home. When told the joyful news she forgot even the tragedy of the broken suspender, and no one was gayer in the celebrations held by the inhabitants of No. 8 and No. 10 that night. True, she upset some festal jelly into her lap, but in that joyous company who cared for such disasters?

The talk naturally turned to the subject of the tableau prize, and the girls criticised such pictures by other groups as they had been able to witness. The same topic was current throughout the school, and interest in it grew as Speech Day drew nearer. It was thought that, as a general effort, the show achieved by No. 8 and No. 10 had been the most impressive; but there had been many good pictures. It was hotly argued that the Masque in *The Tempest*, as presented by Jennifer and her associates, was more than a picture. There had been singing and action too. Opinion was evenly divided. Those who did not support *The Tempest* set the seal of their approval on the last scene of *The Winter's Tale*, which had been given by the Sixth, and in which Arline Chapman had taken the part of the Statue.

The tableaux had been judged by a friend of Miss Courtney's, well known as an authority on scenic effects and plastic representations of all kinds, but no hint could any one get as to which way the wind of her favour had blown. Attempts to surprise mistresses into

admissions by carefully timed queries had failed, and the school secretary had not allowed herself to be pumped. When the noble lady who was to present the prizes and, as the girls put it, supply the "gush" on Speech Day, stood on the platform, with an imposing array of gifts before her, the thoughts of half the school turned to the tableau prize. What was it to be, and who would have it?

Miss Courtney, magnificent in full academic robes, which became her admirably, and which filled the school with awe, read her report. Then the noble lady made a speech, in which she exhorted the girls to be womanly, to use their gentle influence for good, to seek for beauty, and to set their hearts on truth. The words fell vaguely on the ears of our friends in the Middle School, whose gentle influence was exercised chiefly on cricket balls and tennis racquets, yet they were readily stirred to admiration of the beautiful voice and manner of the noble lady herself. It was notable that when some lively person afterwards referred to her speech as "tosh," it was Flip Stoddart who,

to the amazement of every one, sat up and said the speech was "top-hole" and the speechmaker "a good sport"—Flip's highest term of admiration, and one which would have much surprised the noble lady had she heard it.

"I bet she never played anything in her life, Flip," Doris Franklin retorted.

"I don't imply that at all," said Flip. "What I mean is she's thoroughly decent." And at that she left it.

The "thoroughly decent" lady achieved by her personality what she failed to achieve by words, and sent a glow to the heart of every girl whose hand she took, and to whom she murmured a few words of congratulation as she presented the prizes.

Beth received her special prize for botany, a beautifully illustrated book on "Forest Trees." Jennifer, to her own astonishment, had a prize for hand-work. She had delighted in making the raffia bag which she had submitted, but had thought no more of it. She had to be set on her feet by her room-mates and gently shoved in the direction of the platform before she thought

of stepping out to receive the piece of bright tapestry which was her due. Flip and Thomas received no prizes.

After the distribution of the general prizes for the year came the Competition prizes. Girls who had begun to languish under the monotony of hand-clapping now revived, listened to results with enthusiasm, and generally renewed their zest. Singing prizes, recitation prizes, prizes for violin and piano found their way to their respective winners. Then the Head began :

" The prize for the best tableau has been awarded to the girls who presented the last scene from *A Winter's Tale*. Will the stage-manager for that picture please come forward."

Amid a storm of clapping Arline took the prize, a lovely etching, which would hang in the Sixth Form room. Arline was a very popular head girl and the whole school cheered. Nos. 8 and 10 clapped loyally with the rest and, if they felt a little pang of disappointment, they concealed it successfully.

The Head was speaking again.

" Miss Chelfroi greatly admired another

picture, but disqualified it because of certain features which were introduced. Other harmonies were added to the harmonies of colour and grouping, and this was not quite what we had intended. Nevertheless, I have decided to give a second prize. It is awarded to those who presented the Masque from *The Tempest*."

The Middle School rose to a man. Jennifer, once more propelled along her way, was greeted with a veritable hail of claps. The Fourth was enraptured. An etching for their room! Their set to be exalted on Speech Day! They could hardly wait for the conclusion of the ceremonies. The votes of thanks were no sooner proposed and seconded than they were in their form. Flip was vociferously voted to the chair, and made a speech which convulsed them all. The picture was duly christened with a sprinkling of ginger-beer and raised amid general enthusiasm to a conspicuous place on the wall facing the class.

"All the mistresses will have their backs to it," objected some one.

"They've got our lovely mugs to look

at," was the retort. "Follow beauty, girls!"

And so the adventure of the tableau ended in public triumph, but, as Thomas remarked afterwards, the secret service of the mushrooms had perhaps been the best part of it all.

CHAPTER XIV

LUCKY LAPSES

SPEECH DAY was over, and almost immediately "Dunces" was in the throes of packing. Jennifer was going abroad for the holidays with an aunt, and nightly revelled in dreams of Italy. Beth, Thomas, and Flip were hardly less happy. Beth's father was in India, and as she had no close relatives in England, she usually spent the holidays at the house of the Rev. Augustus Spicer, whose wife eked out a small income by taking girls situated like Beth as paying guests for the long school vacations. She and the Rev. Augustus and the Spicer children were uniformly kind to Beth, but it was impossible for the girl not to feel that she was there because she had no home, and she therefore hailed Miss Stoddart's invitation with unbounded delight.

If she would rather have had Flip to herself without Thomas, she gave no hint of it, and tried to give her affection unstintingly to the third member of the party.

The girls were to travel to Thrushcroft straight from school. Tim would not join them until the end of the week, as he was to visit a friend. The Colonel, too, was away until Thursday, when he would return in time to make the arrangements for the projected trip to Scilly. Flip's heart beat fast when she thought of this. Would he really keep her home to stew with a governess if her school report was bad? That it would be good was too much to hope for.

The journey to Thrushcroft was not a long one and was accomplished without mishap, except that Thomas dropped her small case as she bought her ticket. Turning round to pick it up, she took up something she thought was her case and walked on. In a few moments hasty footsteps were heard following her, and a wrathful voice roared out :

"What are you doing with my case?"

"*My* case," said Thomas.

"I say it's mine, and I'll thank you to hand it over."

"Nonsense," began Flip; "it can't possibly be yours." Even as she spoke she caught sight of a dark betraying L. J. P. upon the case, and L. J. P. did not suggest Maisie Morello Crantock.

"Tom," she said, "it *is* his case, you ass. Now, where's yours?"

Poor Thomas had to sing small, apologise to the man for what looked like an attempt to pinch his lawful property, and rush back to the booking-office to seek her own case, which luckily was an unobtrusive little thing and had remained where it fell. The three girls were then hurriedly bundled into the train by a porter, and Flip and Beth, by keeping a careful eye on Thomas, managed to get her safely to her destination with all her possessions intact.

It was very pleasant to find themselves in the Valley of Free Time, and they enjoyed the first days to the full. To wake up in

the mornings and remember there were no bells, no time-table, no hours for speaking French, no returned lessons, no neglected preps to make good at the last moment, was bliss. And then there were all the jolly amusements Thrushcroft afforded. Never before had Beth and Thomas stayed in a house where the means of entertainment were so many and varied. There were the dogs to look after and take for long runs; there was tennis and a miniature golf course. Miss Stoddart drove her own car, and took the girls with her on various excursions in the neighbourhood, and once for a whole day on the moor. Then there was Innsborough Cove. The girls at "Dunces" boasted that no cove on earth could equal the school cove, but Flip, loyal as she was to "Dunces," had held this tenet with a mental reservation in favour of Innsborough, and now that her two friends had been introduced to it they, too, were its sworn supporters. Its rocks, its tumbling waves, its level beach, its diving board which the Colonel had fixed, its caves, and, above all, its shrimp-

ing pools were the theme of their constant praises.

Thomas, who was a town bird, had never shrimped before, and this sport particularly fascinated her. On more than one occasion she had to be fished out of pools into which she had slipped, and set to dry on the rocks; for if Thomas could slip into anything she invariably took advantage of it, until Flip said she was only safe when bathing because then she could lawfully tumble down. All three girls were more like creatures of the sea than of the land in this happy holiday time. They would bathe, then lie on the sand to dry, then bathe again. Sometimes in their bathing dresses they would launch Tim's little canoe and paddle out to sea; sometimes they would strive to mount the inflated horse whose antics on the waves always ended by unseating them. Flip would have been blissfully happy but for fear of her report. This was always in the background of her mind, and constantly she beheld in imagination the others

setting off for Scilly and leaving her disconsolate with some severe governess. To her aunt she said nothing, but talked much of the matter to her two friends.

"Reports will come to-morrow," she said on the Thursday night. "They haven't arrived yet, but they always turn up in the first week, and to-morrow night Father will come home. I'm going to get up and meet the postman to-morrow. Will you?"

Beth and Thomas said they would, and next morning they were as good as their word. The postman was intercepted on his way to the house, and Flip took the letters.

"Here it is," she said. "DUNSCOMBE COLLEGIATE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS—that's the beastly thing all right. And this must be yours, Beth. Do they always send your report to yourself?"

"Yes," replied Beth. "At least they send it to Mr. Cummings, who is my guardian here, you know. Then he posts it to me, and I send it out to India to Father. But he never

looks at it, I think. At least he has never mentioned it."

"What a swizz! And you generally get a good one too. Let's have a look at it."

Together they bent over the document.

"My hat, Beth!" said Flip at last; "I should get downright conceited if I had a report like that. I'd no idea you were such a brainy nut. Just see what Miss Dornington's said!"

"And even E. V. is quite decent, for her," put in Thomas.

"If that were mine now I'd get to Scilly all right," sighed Flip. "I wish I knew what the blighters had said about me. Wish I were in your shoes, Beth."

"Well, why don't you be?" said Beth unexpectedly. "There's only a difference in the name on the top of these things. All the rest is the same. Same form, same subjects, same old mistresses' initials for it all."

"Yes, but——"

"We could do it as easy as winking,"

cried Beth. "Just put my report in your envelope."

Flip's blue eyes opened wide, with a light of hope and daring in them.

"But the envelope?" she said.

"Steam it open!" Beth spoke determinedly.

"And the name?"

"We'd have to get some of that lovely liquid stuff in two bottles marked A and B. You know, Enid Sharle had some last term. We could buy it at Elston's, if we walked to Cardsley. It gets out ink without leaving a trace, and you can write over it after. It wouldn't matter how we write, because anybody tops these things. Look; the writing of my name and form is different from any of the other writings. I believe girls who are thinking of secretarial work do a lot of it."

"But, Beth, it wouldn't be fair. You'll *want* your report. What would your father think if he saw mine?"

"I wouldn't send him yours. I wouldn't send him any. He wouldn't notice. You see"—and here Beth spoke with an effort,

for it was a sore point—" he doesn't care anything about me. He wanted a boy. And Mother died when I was born. I've never seen my Father, you know."

" If you don't really care it would be glorious for me," said Flip.

" The only thing I'd like," said Beth, still speaking with effort, " is what Miss MacCarthy's said about me."

For once Flip forbore to tease. " You shall have the whole thing back," she said. " I can easily ask to have my first good report for keeps. Oh, Beth, what a lark! How Father will gasp! It isn't like a little improvement. It's so *sudden*."

No time was wasted over breakfast that morning, and very soon the girls were making their way to Cardsley. But Elston's did not stock the magic ink-eraser. It was not until they had visited the third of the stationers' shops in the little town that they managed to secure their heart's desire.

The next difficulty was how to steam open the envelope. Steam seemed hard

to come by in any secret place on that summer day. The only course seemed to be to picnic at Innsborough, taking with them a kettle to boil for tea, and this was accordingly arranged. When they set out beach-ward armed with a kettle, a fountain pen, some gum in a bottle, the famous eraser, and the two long envelopes, they felt that they were conspirators indeed. Once arrived on the beach, they wasted no time. Sticks were gathered, the kettle set on to boil. As soon as steam began to issue cheerily from the spout Flip placed in its path the envelope whose appearance she had been dreading. The flap grew moist and yielded.

Flip drew out the report.

It was certainly not very cheerful reading, the only bright spot being the entry under *Science*: "Philippa shows interest and initiative." E. V. had written caustically under *English*: "Nothing done."

"And I made such a dead set at English, too," said Flip. "I call that darned

ungrateful of E. V. 'Nothing done!' Well, there'll be nothing doing *next* term, I can promise her that. Catch me chucking any more motor-bikes about. That was initiative if you like. Now then, Beth, let's turn black white with that patent stuff of yours."

"All right. You get out of the way, and you too, Thomas. You'll make a mess of it. Now give me A."

Flip and Thomas retired to a respectful distance from the immediate scene of operations. Beth applied A with the little glass rod, then B.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" she said. "It's dissolved it all away."

"Quick—let me write in my new name." Flip flourished a pen."

"Keep off, Flip, keep off!" cried Beth. "It must dry absolutely. Besides, you mustn't write your own name. Any fool would spot that. I'll write it."

And write it she did, to her own great satisfaction. The report headed "Philippa Stoddart" was now a glowing record, which would greatly have surprised the

mistresses of "Dunces" could they have seen it.

"Now let's put it in the envelope and re-seal, and we've done. What shall we do with this one?" Beth took up Flip's true report.

"Cremation will be its fitting end, I think," said Flip. "Give it to me."

Beth passed it over and Flip placed it in the flame. She watched it shrink and writhe with considerable satisfaction, as the blue tooth of the flame bit into it. Then she contemplated it, black and brittle.

"That's gone! They didn't think fire would be the end of it. You just stay here and wait, and I'll scoot back and pop this into Father's study. Glorious revelation of my brainyness it will be to him!"

She ran off with the envelope, and, unseen by any one, placed it with the other letters. Then, with a quiet and happy heart, she returned to the beach and gave herself up to the joys of the afternoon.

"He'll send for me to-morrow after break-

fast if he comes home in pretty good time to-night," she said.

She was right. Before ten o'clock the next day the summons came.

"Am I tidy?" she demanded of her friends.

"Pull your belt round a bit," said Beth critically.

Flip seemed a little perturbed. "Beth," she said, "it isn't a lie, is it?"

"What's a lie?"

"The report."

"You won't have to say anything. It isn't a lie, is it, Tom, if she doesn't speak?"

"Your father's waiting, miss," said the maid, reappearing.

Flip made rather slowly for the study, telling herself it was all right. Colonel Stoddart was standing by the window, the report in his hand.

"I've had this, Philippa, from Dunscombe. Very good! Very good indeed! And I'm glad—very glad. A young fellow ought to work. You aren't a young fellow, of course, but same thing—

same thing. Must give your mind to learning, and that's what you've been doing. Your aunt will be pleased too. Better take it to her, and—— Here! Something to remember it by—remember it by!"

He tendered Flip half a crown.

Flip had the grace to blush. Instead of taking the tip, she put her hands behind her back. The Colonel looked at her in surprise. She was not wont to be backward in accepting gifts of the kind.

"Well?" he queried.

"It . . . it . . . isn't mine," said Flip. "That's Beth's report."

"It's *what*?"

"Beth's report—Beth Freeman, who is staying with me, whom you saw last night."

"Staying here? Who's staying here?"

"Beth—Beth Freeman! You saw her last night."

"Well, what's she got to do with it?"

"It's . . . it's her report."

"Nonsense!" said the Colonel. "Here's your name—here's your name."

"I altered it," said Flip; "I altered it with some liquid stuff."

The Colonel's eyes darkened with anger.

"What's that?" he said. "You what?"

"Altered it," replied Flip doggedly.

"And the envelope?"

"Steamed it open." Even Flip was frightened. It seemed so awful now.

"You mean to say," queried the Colonel, "that you deliberately took an envelope addressed to me, opened it, altered the contents, and sealed it up again?"

"Yes," said Flip in a small voice.

"Come here."

Flip advanced to the window slowly.

"Don't you know that it's a crime—a crime—to do what you've done, and one that deserves punishment, and heavy punishment at that? Don't you know that nobody with any sense of honour or decency ever dreams of tampering with a letter addressed to somebody else? Where's the thing that was really sent to me?"

"I burnt it," said Flip, and waited for what should happen to her. The Colonel began to pace up and down the room without speaking. Then at last:

"Stand there at attention facing the desk until I come back," said he, "and don't move. I shall punish you later. It's what I've always said. There's no discipline —discipline!"

He strode into the hall in search of his sister.

"Take those two girls out with you this morning, will you, Claire? I shall want Philippa for a bit."

Miss Stoddart wondered but asked no questions. She merely told the visitors that Philippa would be with her father for the morning, and bore them off in her car.

In the meantime Flip stood motionless facing the desk and meditating on the form her punishment was likely to take. Every moment she expected the door to open. She had seldom seen her father so angry, and even to herself, now, it seemed that the action which she had looked upon

as a gay game had something crooked about it. Flip hated crookedness. An hour passed and she grew very weary, yet dared not shift her position. One thing she had determined. Her father should find her a sufficiently disciplined soldier, ready to obey an order.

Now Colonel Stoddart's temper was soon roused, but also it soon subsided. He had meant to return to Flip in about ten minutes after visiting the kennels, and set her some task as a punishment to occupy her for the morning, instead of allowing her to enjoy herself. But a man had come about a pedigree spaniel which the Colonel was keen to obtain. Without another thought of Flip, he went with Mr. Bentham to the farm to see the litter, and from the puppies he passed to Mr. Bentham's new scheme of drainage. It was nearly lunch-time when he retraced his steps to Thrushcroft. In the drive he was overtaken by his sister's car. She pulled up to give him a lift to the house.

"Where's Philippa?" she said. "I understood she was with you."

The Colonel started. "Gad! I'd forgotten her! I was furious with her this morning because she had the confounded audacity to open a letter of mine and change the contents. I believe I told her to stand still where she was. But she'll have moved long before this."

"Please, Colonel Stoddart, I am to blame about the letter. Honest Injun, I am. I put the idea into her head, and got the eraser and all, and I wrote in her name, and——"

"You seem to be a desperate character."

The Colonel had had a good bargain over the pedigree pup and was feeling pleased with the world. Flip's crime did not seem so reprehensible now.

"Well, you must go for me if you go for anybody," said Beth. "Flip would never have dreamt of it if it weren't for me."

"You remind me of somebody," ejaculated the Colonel. "No relation to Jim Freeman of the Lancashire Fusiliers, are you?"

"I'm his daughter," said Beth proudly,

" though he doesn't think much of me. I'm a girl, you see."

" Well, well," said the Colonel, " what an extraordinary thing! Jim and I were at Marlborough together. Why haven't you been here before? Ought to have spent all your holidays here, of course — all your holidays. Can't think what Philippa was about not to warn me you were Jim's daughter. When you find her, tell her I want her, will you? "

By this time the car had reached the house. The two girls ran to Flip's room, while the Colonel made his way to the study. Flip was dead tired by this time, but she still kept her place.

" Bless my soul! " said her father; " you been here all this time? "

" Yes," said Flip.

" Never moved? "

" No."

" Well, well, you'll make a soldier yet! Make a soldier yet! Be off with you! To tell the truth, I forgot you, quite forgot you."

" And aren't you going to punish me? "

said Flip joyfully. "My report was bad. Shall I go to Scilly?"

"Scilly! Who said anything about Scilly?" He had long since forgotten his threat of the preceding holiday.

Flip looked at him incredulously for a moment, then realised that he had indeed forgotten. She turned to go, half staggering with weariness.

"Stiff?" He was full of compunction that he had left her so long.

"No, thank you," said Flip.

"You've had a pretty stiff punishment. Sit here." He gave her a chair. "Why didn't you tell me this Beth girl was Jim Freeman's daughter? Jim's one of the best friends I ever had. She'd better come to Scilly with us—come to Scilly with us! Spoke up for you like a man just now, too! Right-minded girl—very right-minded! Though you must never play that trick again! No gentleman ever would—no gentleman! You aren't a gentleman, of course, but same thing—same thing! Every lady must be a gentleman!"

Flip had risen; her weariness had flown.

She was to go to Scilly, and, wonder of wonders, Beth would come too! Could anything be more glorious? She dashed up the stairs to pour the whole story into her chum's delighted ears.

THE END

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